

Who Jesus Praised, part 1
December 1, 2013

One of the most common aspects to being a human is that we want to be known. We want to be known. We want others to know us, to like us, to love us, to respect us, to praise us. We want to be known.

We see this in the little children who say over and over and over again, "Watch me, mommy. Watch me." And they will repeat that refrain until they have mom's attention and watch them do whatever it is they want to show mom. And they are waiting to hear you say the words, "Good job!"

We want to be known. We want to be recognized. We want to be liked and loved and even praised. We want these things... need these things from family. Later we need these from friends, from teachers. Eventually we need these things from God, too.

We come to recognize the reality of God and long to know that God loves us. We long to know that God smiles down upon us. In Jesus Christ we have come to know exactly that. The Bible says...

John 3:16 (NIV) "For God so loved the world that he gave..."

God so loves us that He gave us something we desperately needed. God cares about us. He cares deeply about us. And we don't need to say, "Watch me, God, watch me, watch me," to get His attention. He is very attentive to us every day. You may not be conscious of it, but that doesn't mean He isn't watching us.

When my sons were small, I would go into their room at night and just watch them sleep. How many of you parents did that with your kids? You were very aware of your children. They didn't need to do unusual things to get your attention. You were very aware of them. My sons never woke up and saw me watching them. But I did.

God too is very aware of you and the things of your life. You don't have to nag God for His attention. He knows everything about you. There is nothing about you God does not know. He knows your every longing, every dream, every wish, every desire, every feeling, every thought, every heartache, every need. God knows everything about you. There is nothing about you God does not know. He is very aware of you.

God is very aware of our need for a relationship with Him. God is aware of our need and loves us. That is why He gave.

John 3:16 (NIV) "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

God loves us so much that He gave us exactly what we most needed, a Savior from the consequences of our sin. Without Jesus we were living on death row. Look at the next verses.

John 3:17-18 (NIV) For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.

God is very aware of you. God is very aware of your needs. God is very aware of your wants. One of our needs/wants is to know that God likes us. John 3:16 seems so general. God so loved the world. You can put your name there. You can put your name in that verse. God so loved Robin Lee Shifflett. I can put my name there. I can put my name there because the world can't be saved. Only people are saved. Only individuals are saved. American isn't saved. Individual Americans can be saved. Russia isn't saved. Only individual Russians can be saved. God loves all the people of the world and sent all of them a savior. But each one must put his or her faith in Him.

Still, the "all the world" sounds so impersonal. It just doesn't seem to satisfy our desire to know that we are acceptable to God. We want some praise from God. We want our lives to measure up. We want to be able to do something for God to say, "Good job."

Let me give you an example of what I mean. Do you ever brag on your kids to your friends or coworkers? Do you ever tell your coworkers how great your spouse is? "Oh, I have the best husband. He..." and you proceed to tell them what he does that is so wonderful. Or you brag on your kids when they did something brave or creative. The current issue of Readers Digest has a woman bragging on the courage of her son during the Sandy Hook School shooting.

I think we want that kind of attention from Jesus. We want to know that if Jesus was with His disciples and the subject of us came up, Jesus would say, "Oh, that is one of my best disciples. She has such great faith." Don't we long for that to be true of us?

When I first came to this church and was getting to know people, Jesus would tell me about the great faith of Janet Cook. She had been through such struggles and heartaches in her life and yet she was always full of joy and faith in Jesus Christ. And made such an impact on the others in this church that more than one or two of you commented on it to me. "Janet has a really strong faith."

Isn't that what you want to hear from Jesus? Well there are some who did. There are a few people in the Bible who got some special words about them by Jesus. And we're going to look at two of them in this series.

Luke 7:1-10 (NIV) When Jesus had finished saying all this in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum. There a centurion's servant, whom his master valued highly, was sick and about to die. The centurion heard of Jesus and sent some elders of the Jews to him, asking him to come and heal his servant. When they came to Jesus, they pleaded earnestly with him, "This man deserves to have you do this, because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue."

So Jesus went with them. He was not far from the house when the centurion sent friends to say to him: "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. 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." Then the men who had been sent returned to the house and found the servant well.

This man is a Roman army officer. His name comes from the fact that he commands 100 men. As an officer he received more pay than those under him. He did pretty well for himself. He likely owned or rented his own home and had a few servants.

One of his servants is ill, and we see something of this soldier's heart in that he cared about his servant. He hears of Jesus, a miracle healer, and wants to inquire if Jesus would help this Roman soldier.

It is doubtful. The Jews were none too accepting of the Roman occupation army in their country. The Jews hated the Romans and the Romans hated them back. Yet this soldier is not your typical Roman, as we shall see.

He dares to ask the Jewish elders in this town to ask Jesus for him, and amazingly, they do. Note that they tell Jesus, "This man deserves your help. He loves our nation and has built our synagogue."

Here we get a further clue as to this soldier's heart. He was a deeply religious man. Though they do not say so specifically, he was probably a God-fearer.

He was a "God-fearer", a phrase used to describe a non-Jew who worshipped Yahweh (Acts 13:26), but had not fully converted. He may have attended services at the synagogue and studied the Jewish faith.

Some Romans, and other non-Jews, were attracted to Judaism because of its monotheism and high moral teachings.. There was a pantheon of gods in the Roman belief system, and the gods were immoral and capricious. They might hurt you as much as help you. Each had a separate agenda from the others and they plotted and schemed against each other like sinful men.

By contrast, Yahweh, the God of the Jews was only one God. He was the Most High God, creator of heaven and earth. He was good, kind, merciful, and faithful. This attracted people of other lands and religions.

Becoming a God-fearer (passages) was the first step towards full conversion. The second step involved a baptism, a sacrifice, an oath, a meal, and circumcision. Full conversion may have been frowned upon by the Roman army authorities. Full conversion might be bad for one's career. This is not the only such man we see in the Bible.

This man had spent a lot of his own money for building a synagogue in the community. No doubt he had done other good works too, to show a change of character and become a son of the Law. And look at the result, the Jewish elders tell Jesus, "He deserves to

have you do this." That is something you'd never expect to hear come out of their mouths.

It says they were not far from the house. The man possibly saw Jesus coming from a window, and sends friends to tell Jesus that He does not need to come to the man's home. He does not expect Jesus to come into the home of a non-Jew. He knew a Jewish teacher would not want to do that. So he sends word that he does not expect Jesus to come, and asks that He heal the servant regardless. He knows Jesus can do it, even without being in the presence of the servant.

So don't go out of your way, Jesus. Don't go out of your way for someone like me. I know you can heal from there or anywhere. Your power is not limited by sight or vicinity.

This man recognized something in Jesus that no one else understood. Others thought Jesus to be just a man, a prophet maybe, sent with a message from God, but not with God's authority.

This man understood what it was to have authority, to exercise authority. He recognized that Jesus had such authority. That is why He could do the things He was doing. It wasn't luck. It wasn't magic. It wasn't superstition. It wasn't potions or incantations. It wasn't an aligning of the stars. It was God's authority.

The man was stating, "Jesus, I know you have God's power and authority and as such You are not limited by location for healing someone. You can heal anyone from any other location. You don't need to be right here. You have spiritual authority to heal, and such authority does not depend on Your presence. Just say the word and I know it will be done. Your authority reaches to wherever I am."

Luke 7:9 (NIV) 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."

This is truly amazing to Jesus. Here we see the humanity of Jesus. He is genuinely amazed at this man's faith. This man recognizes in Jesus an authority that no one else has seen, not even Jesus' disciples. And Jesus makes special mention of this man to His disciples. In essence this man receives praise from Jesus for his great faith.

Isn't that what you want? I do! I want a great faith in Jesus. I want a great obedience to Jesus. I want a life lived fully trusting in Jesus, no matter what happens. I want the kind of faith that Jesus praises.

If this is what you want, then believe. Believe what Jesus said about Himself. The miracles attest to the authority of His words. More than anything else His resurrection attests to the authority of His words. Who else do you know of who predicted his own resurrection and it happened? I'm going to go with whatever Jesus says. He has the authority of God.

Today, Jesus' authority still reaches wherever you are. His power is not limited to within your sight of Him. Just because you do not see Him does not mean He does not see

you. His authority is even greater now than it was before His resurrection. He is not limited in what He CAN do for you. There are limits to what He WILL do for you. But that is not the same.

The soldier's faith was not in what Jesus WOULD do, but in what Jesus COULD do. He asked and left the decision in Jesus' hands. He knew He was not worthy of receiving. But he asked. It doesn't hurt to ask. God won't send you to hell for asking. He won't punish you for asking.

Remember, God loves you. He doesn't punish us for asking. In fact, He praises us for believing. Jesus was on a constant lookout for faith, true faith, deep faith, like the faith of this Roman soldier.

You can have such faith. It is choice. Anytime you believe someone's word, it is a choice. You can choose to have such complete faith in Jesus, in God's promises to us. There is no limit to God's power and no shortage of His love for you. The faith that Jesus praised is a full faith in the power and goodness of Jesus. You too can have such a faith. Jesus used that power and love to save you from your sins.

Don't limit what Jesus can do in your life. Believe. Believe that He loves you. Believe that He sent a Savior for you. Believe He can meet your every need, from heaven, with just a word. Believe that He can save you, and will, if you ask Him in faith. Believe and Ask.

Are you doubting the power of Jesus today? No He isn't still on the earth. But that doesn't mean you are invisible to Him, just because He is invisible to you. Jesus can meet your every need. Jesus is not less powerful just because He has gone to heaven. Jesus can still save today. He can save you. Call on Him for forgiveness.