

August 8, 2021

The Centurion: God's Favor

Last week we learned the Centurion understood the power of words and that to be **in authority** one must be **under authority** to which Jesus marveled at his "great faith," (**Matt 8:5-13**). This Centurion was a humble man and Scripture tells us "*God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble,*" (**1 Pet 5:5**).

God's grace isn't only for salvation, it is for living an abundant, victorious life filled with joy!

Grace: Strong's # 5485 *charis* (khar-ece), from *chara* "joy" and *chairō* "to rejoice." It is the divine influence upon the heart and its reflection in our life that **brings favor**, benefits, joy, gratitude, liberality and pleasure. It is unmerited favor and underserved blessings, a free gift from God. Grace is not only our free gift of salvation, but it is also the power-word describing the Holy Spirit's operational means. **Grace is a force as well as a favor, being a verb as well as a noun.** Grace is the power to overcome sin, not the power to live with it.

Acts chapters 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, and 26 are about Paul being imprisoned which made it possible for him to preach the Gospel to officials, governors, the king and eventually Caesar. Through most of this, the Centurions guarded and protected Paul. The government allowed Paul to preach to the governments of the Jews and the Gentiles. At the start of chapter 21, Paul had been sharing the Gospel for several years and considering going back to Jerusalem.

Acts 21:10-14 *And as we stayed many days, a certain prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. 11 When he had come to us, he took Paul's belt, bound his own hands and feet, and said, "Thus says the Holy Spirit, 'So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man who owns this belt, and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.'"*

*12 Now when we heard these things, both we and those from that place pleaded with him not to go up to Jerusalem. 13 Then Paul answered, "What do you mean by weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, **but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.**" 14 So when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, "The will of the Lord be done." The disciples did not agree with Paul, but trusted in the Lord and His will be done.*

When Paul got to Jerusalem, the Jews had been misinformed about Paul and twisted his teachings making them to appear contrary to the law of Moses. To respond to this, Paul went into the temple with others to perform a purification ritual. While in the temple, the Jews from Asia saw him and stirred up the whole crowd accusing Paul of something he didn't do twisting the truth. They dragged him out of the temple and started to beat him, wanting to kill him. The Commander of the Garrison heard and immediately took soldiers and Centurions to stop the commotion.

Once they separated Paul from the crowd, he stopped on the stairs of the barracks to address the people and told of his conversion on the road to Damascus and how Jesus appeared to him. They all listened until Paul said Jesus told him "*Depart for I will send you far from here to the Gentiles.*" At that point, they started yelling "*Away with such a fellow from the earth for he is not fit to live!*"

The Commander ordered Paul to be brought into the barracks and scourged to know why the people are so against him. Paul said to the Centurion, "*Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman and uncondemned?*" The Centurion told his Commander, and then the Commander was concerned because he bound a Roman citizen. **First**, Paul had to know **Roman law** and **second**, he had to find **favor** with the Centurion and the Commander.

The next day the Commander brought Paul before the Sanhedrin, the **legal Jewish court system**. Paul addressed them and another ruckus broke out and the Commander pulled Paul out again and brought him into the barracks.

Forty Jews took an oath to not eat nor drink until they killed Paul and set a trap for him. Paul's nephew heard of the plot and told Paul who called one of the **Centurions** and asked him to take the young man to the Commander because he has something to say. The Commander believed the young man and called two Centurions telling them to prepare 200 soldiers, 70 horsemen and 200 spearmen to get Paul in the middle of the night and bring him safely to the governor Felix, who in turn took him to Herod's Praetorium.

After 5 days, Ananias the high priest and the elders came to testify to the governor against Paul. They accused him of **sedition** (treason) and profaning the temple, being the leader of a sect causing trouble to all the Jews. Paul gives his testimony to Felix and then he handed Paul to the **Centurion** to keep him at liberty and to allow his friends to come and provide for him. Felix and his wife Drusilla came to Paul to hear more about his faith in Christ.

Paul was under house arrest for 2 years and at that time Porcius Festus succeeded Felix. The high priest petitioned Festus for Paul to be brought to Jerusalem so they could try him. They made many false claims against him, but they could not prove any. They wanted to ambush Paul on the way to Jerusalem and kill him. Festus wanting to do the Jews a favor, was considering sending Paul to Jerusalem and Paul said "**I appeal to Caesar.**" Caesar was the highest judge, the highest court in the land.

King Agrippa and Bernice came to Caesarea to greet Festus and he told them about Paul, so King Agrippa wanted to hear from Paul himself. So with great pomp (pageantry) the King and Bernice entered the auditorium and Paul testified to all about his conversion to Christ. When Paul was finished, Agrippa said to Paul, "*You almost persuade me to become a Christian.*" Agrippa and Festus talked amongst themselves and said this man did nothing deserving of death or chains and that he might have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar. So now Paul starts his voyage to Rome with a **Centurion named Julius**.

Paul found **great favor** with the Centurions and they were his personal body guards. This favor is from God's grace. Pastor Duane Vander Klok **defines favor** as "The friendly disposition from which kindly acts proceed to assist, to provide with special advantages, to receive preferential treatment." God desires to bless, help and promote us and treat us special.

Ps 89:15-18 *Blessed are the people who **know the joyful sound!** This is Strong's #8643 teruah! Blessed are those who know the teruah, the great shout of praise, victory and joy!!!*

*They walk, O Lord, in the light of Your countenance. 16 In Your name **they rejoice** all day long, And in Your righteousness they are exalted. 17 For You are the glory of their strength, And in **Your favor our horn is exalted.** 18 For our shield belongs to the Lord, And our king to the Holy One of Israel.*

Ps 92:10 *But my **horn** You have exalted like a wild ox; I have been anointed with fresh oil.* Our horn is symbolic of our authority and strength.

Ps 5:11-12 *But let all those rejoice who put their trust in You; Let them ever **shout for joy**, because You defend them; Let those also who love Your name Be joyful in You. 12 For You, O Lord, will bless the righteous; **With favor You will surround him as with a shield.***

Luke 2:51-52 *Then He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them, but His mother kept all these things in her heart. 52 And **Jesus increased** in wisdom and stature, and in **favor with God and men.***

Just like we increase in wisdom, we can increase in favor.

Heb 11:6 *But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who **diligently seek Him.***

Matt 9:29 *Then He touched their eyes, saying, "According to your faith let it be to you."*