

“ENCOUNTERS ~ The Roman Centurion” [10.04.09]

Keith Hernandez is considered one of the Best Defensive 1<sup>st</sup> Baseman to ever play Major League baseball.

- He won 11 consecutive Gold Glove Awards from 1978 – 1988
  - 1979 National League co- MVP with Willie Stargell
  - He is a lifetime .300 hitter
  - 1986 he was a member of the World Champion New York Mets

Yet with all his achievements; he has MISSED OUT on one thing; his father’s acceptance & recognition of valuing his hard earned accomplishments.

- Listen to what he had to say in a very candid interview about his relationship with his father: One day Keith asked his father...
  - ‘Dad, I have a lifetime batting average of .300; what more do you want?’
  - His father replied, “But someday you’re going to look back & say, I could have done more.”

This morning as we begin this new series, I must confess that this 1<sup>st</sup> message has stirred up some old ghosts from my past that are hard to shake.

These old ghosts hold me back @ times from experiencing God’s grace in its purest form; my prayer is that you experience His grace like never before!

[Let’s PRAY]

- I. The Roman Centurion’s encounter with Jesus
  - A. (R) Luke 7: 1 – 2 or p. 787 in pew Bible
  - B. NLT translates Jesus’ encounter with a “Roman Officer” in the original language this man was a “Roman Centurion.”
    1. In the Roman Army this man was in charge of (100) military soldiers.
      - a. Modern day contemporaries of our Non-Commissioned Officers, 1<sup>st</sup> Sergeants & Sergeant Majors.
      - b. Very well paid - - regular soldiers made 75 denarii per year; but Centurions made between 3,750 denarii & 7,500 denarii annually.
    2. Centurions often suffered heavy casualties in battle, fighting alongside the legionaries they commanded - - leading from the front, occupying a position @ the front of the battle formation; possessed great skill & courage!
      - a. [Annals of history] we learn from the ancient historian, Polybius, that a centurion must not be so much seekers after danger, as men who can command, steady in action; and reliable.
      - b. They ought not to be over anxious to rush into the fight; but when hard pressed they must be ready to hold their ground & die @ their posts.
      - c. A centurion must be a man among men:

As we continue reading we learn that this centurion was not only a good soldier, BUT...

C. (R) Luke 7: 3 – 8

1. The centurion had a completely unusual attitude toward his slave:
  - a. It's obvious that the Roman centurion cared deeply for his slave; & this attribute was very foreign to his culture.
  - b. In Roman law a slave was defined as a living tool; slaves had no rights; a master could ill-treat him & even kill him if he chose.
  - c. It was common practice for slave owners to kill their slaves when they became seriously ill or injured to the point where they could not perform their responsibilities.
2. The centurion was also a very loving & generous man.
  - a. Although he was not Jewish, he had built quite a reputation among the religious leaders in Capernaum.
  - b. v. 5 explains, "...for he loves the Jews & even built a synagogue for us."
  - c. Apparently he had made a big donation to the synagogue bldg fund.
3. The centurion also had an extremely unusual attitude toward the Jews.
  - a. Anti-Semitism is not a new thing; the Romans called the Jews a filthy race; they spoke of Judaism=religion w/the utmost disdain.
  - b. For a non-Jew to get the religious leaders of the synagogue to plead earnestly with Jesus on his behalf, says a lot about the esteem in which they held him.
  - c. Respected Jews were often proud that they had no association with a non – Jews; but apparently this enemy soldier had won their affections.
4. The centurion was a deeply humble man.
  - a. Centurions did not rise through the ranks of the Roman legion by being bashful or self-effacing.
  - b. NOTICE the centurion never personally appears before Jesus.
  - c. Couple of possibilities:
    - i. He knew quite well that a strict Jew was forbidden by the law to enter the house of an unclean Gentile.
    - ii. [just the tip of the iceberg] Clearly it was because of a sense of personal unworthiness = vv 6 – 7 he told his friends to let Jesus know that he didn't DESERVE to even meet Jesus face to face ; Jesus was much too good to deal with such a uncleanness
      1. The Centurion had a very clear sense of who Jesus is, and deeply respected Him as a man & His authority.
      2. As a result, he knew that he was unworthy for Jesus to even GRACE his home with His very presence.
5. One last quality the centurion possessed a remarkable faith.
  - a. I love the confidence of the centurion - - his faith in God, is rock solid!
  - b. v. 7 "Just say the word from where you are & my servant will be healed"

- i. When's the last time you prayed like this = "Lord, I know you can do this." How long has it been?
- ii. I believe this child-like confidence in God is what is missing in most of our lives today.
- iii. POWERFUL GIFT = rock solid confidence that you not only believe BUT that you KNOW that God is going to navigate you through this present crisis!

Bible defines FAITH = Hebrews 11: 1

"Faith is the confidence that what we hope for will actually happen; it gives us assurance about things we cannot see."

- iv. What strikes me is the fact that the centurion saw the need = his servant sick & near death & he acted upon it; Faith in Action
- v. [INSERT] analogy of the rowboat = (2) oars

#### D. (R) Luke 7: 9 – 10

- Only twice in scripture is it recorded that Jesus ever showed any sense of being amazed.
  - [Mark 6: 6] Jesus was amazed @ their lack of faith."
  - + here in [Luke 7: 9]
  - Because of his rock-solid confidence Luke adds 7: 10 almost as an after-thought. You can almost see Luke smiling as he writes,
 

"...when the centurion's friends returned to his house, they found the slave completely healed." ☺

Do you possess a ROCK-SOLID confidence in God?

I must confess this is where some of my old ghosts were stirred up this week.

It has nothing to do with the truth of God's word or His nature; it has everything to do with my VAGUE understanding of His mercy & grace!

I grew up thinking much like the respected elders who went before Jesus on the centurion's behalf & said, "...if anyone DESERVES your help, he does."

Indicating that the centurion's good deeds earned him special favor with God; This has always been an unhealthy notion I picked up from childhood.

## II. REALTY of GRACE

- A. Do you ever compare yourself to the culture & society around you instead of comparing yourself to Jesus Christ; & feel pretty smug about yourself?
  1. If you are not careful you will fall into the trap of thinking you can earn God's acceptance = His grace & favor
  2. SENSE of ENTITLEMENT is very dangerous!

As I care to listen to scripture; I hear a loud whisper from the gospel that I did not get what I deserved:

- I deserved punishment and got forgiveness!
- I deserved wrath but instead got unconditional love!

B. Faulty thinking = in our country; many of us were raised to work hard & to earn our own way; strong work ethic is necessary to succeed.

- From nursery school onward we were taught how to succeed = the early bird always gets the worm; no pain no gain.
- I know these rules well because I live by them [Proud of it] I work for what I earn; I like to win; I insist upon my rights.
- For many years I smugly wanted people to get what they deserve, nothing more or nothing less!

This naturally translated into the realm of God ~ unhealthy thinking surfaced!

C. The notion of God's love coming to us free of charge + no strings attached + seems to go against every instinct of humanity:

1. The Buddhist [eight-fold path]
2. The Hindu [doctrine of karma]
3. The Jewish [O.T. covenant]
4. The Muslim [code of law]

Each of these religions offers a way to earn God's approval! Only Christianity dares to make God's love unconditional - - Gift of Grace

Salvation comes from heaven downward - - not earth upward. The gift is not from man to God = it is from God to man.

It is not our love for God - - its God love for us!

Salvation is: God-give + God-driven ~ ~ ~ God-empowered + God-originated!

(R) Ephesians 2: 4 – 9 or p. 895 in pew Bible