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THE GREAT HELPER.

– FEB. 16. – Luke 7:2-16. –

Golden Text – "And there came a fear on all; and they glorified God, saying, A great prophet is risen among us, and God hath visited his people." – Luke 7:16.

IN THIS narrative a believing Gentile is brought to our attention whose faith and humility are worthy of imitation. An officer among the Roman soldiers on duty in Palestine, he had come in contact with God's people and law and from these had learned something of the righteousness of God, of his wonderful leading and teaching of his people, and of the promises given to them. Evidently these things had awakened in him feelings of reverence for God and love for righteousness and truth. These sentiments towards the God of Israel found expression in special kindness toward his people; and, being a man of means, he had built a synagogue for some of them.

Evidently he was naturally a benevolent man, well disposed, and had a heart, which, had he been born an Israelite [R1922 : page 23] and entitled to the privileges of that elect nation, would have proved to be good soil in which the good seed of the Kingdom, planted by our Lord, would have brought forth good results and have constituted him one of the "brethren." This is attested not only by his faith, but also by the fact that his servant was "dear unto him," so loved that he went to much trouble to secure his healing. In his humility he felt unworthy of our Lord's favors, realizing, as did the Syrophenician woman, that the Gentiles were as "dogs" who could have only the crumbs from the children's table. Hence he got the elders of his city to request the Master to heal his servant; and they urged his request before our Lord, saying that he was a good man, "He loveth our nation and hath built us a synagogue."

The beauty of the centurion's faith and humility was specially manifest in his afterthought and message of apology to the Lord for having asked him to come to his house to see his servant; for he felt that in so doing he had only put him on a par with other physicians, and besides was taking him away from other and more important work: hence his message, I am unworthy that you should come under my roof; but being myself a man clothed with authority, and accustomed to doing things by my servant's hands, I know that you can do the same on a higher plane with your servants and agents: therefore simply speak the word of command, and it shall be done.

This simple, noble faith and humility were very pleasing to the Lord, who declared, "I have not found so great faith, – no not in Israel," where he had much more reason to expect it. His faith was rewarded by the healing of his servant, and our Lord, who had received his message through the Elders at Capernaum (verse 3), and who had already started toward the Centurion's house, discontinued his journey and instantly granted the healing of the servant.

Impressed by the faith and goodness of this Centurion, so unexpected among Roman soldiers, we were considering that it would be "just like the Lord" to send the gospel to such a noble Gentile soon after the Jewish favor would end, when the doors of divine love and mercy would be opened to Gentiles as well as Israelites. Then the Lord brought to our memory Cornelius, the first Gentile to whom the gospel message was sent. (Acts 10:1-8.) We remembered that he also was a Centurion, and of him also it is recorded that he was "a devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God always." It is not probable that among the Roman soldiers of Palestine there were two Centurions of such similarly exceptional character. The residence of the Centurion mentioned by Luke is not stated but that of Cornelius is mentioned: it was Caesarea. Turning to Map No. 10 in a Teacher's Bible we found with no little pleasure that the distance from Capernaum to Caesarea is only about 45 miles, and that Nain is on the way, a little to the East, about 20 miles

from Capernaum. We note also the remark of Peter, when preaching Christ and his gospel to Cornelius (Acts 10:37), to the effect that Cornelius already knew the word which Jesus had preached throughout all Judea. In our judgment the circumstantial evidences are strong that the Centurion of our lesson was Cornelius. This would also explain why the holy spirit was poured out on Cornelius and his house even *while Peter yet spake*, and before it is even stated that Cornelius accepted Christ; for apparently he had already done so, as narrated by Luke. **[R1923 : page 23]**

It was just like the Lord, too, to keep in mind this exceptional character among the Gentiles, and when the due time came for the gospel to be preached to the Gentiles, to send it to him first. "Them that honor me, I will honor," saith the Lord; and so it appears in this case that the Centurion was doubly honored, first in the granting of his request and in the friendship and commendation of the Lord; and subsequently in being the first Gentile to receive the holy spirit of adoption as a son and heir of God.

The power manifested by Jesus in reawakening the young man of Nain was another proof of his Messiahship which none of his enemies could gainsay or resist; and the people drew from this potent argument the only legitimate conclusion. There came a reverential fear on all; for they felt that this was indeed the great prophet sent of God, and that in him God had visited his people to bless them with his love and grace; and they glorified God.

If the people had only followed their convictions, based upon such indubitable testimony, how greatly they would have been blessed! But instead of doing this, they afterward stifled their convictions and weakly leaned upon the judgment of their blind guides; and by and by, with few exceptions, notwithstanding all the testimony of his wonderful teachings and mighty works, and notwithstanding all that the prophets wrote concerning him, which was plainly fulfilled in him, they stumbled into unbelief and crucified the Lord's Anointed. Let children of God to-day

beware of a similar mistake, and when convinced of the truth, hold it fast in a good and honest heart and promptly acknowledge it, lest blindness come upon them; remembering the Lord's words, – "He that is ashamed of me and my words, of him will I be ashamed."
