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I am not worthy

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Series: Let God Be God

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INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

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The world in which we live is a world filled with illusions... promises that in reality cannot be fulfilled, but that *appear* nonetheless to be real. Mirages they are, glimmering prospects of refreshment that seem to offer hope until you get close enough to see them for what they are. The trouble is, then it is so often too late. You have given life for something that does not exist.

One example of such an illusion is man's quest for security. It is built into the personality of the human race to want assurance that tomorrow will not catch us unaware. So we have devised various schemes to guarantee our future. Insurance is one. Securities are another. Retirement plans, hospitalization plans, savings plans...all are designed to give man some form of guarantee that when the sunset years of life approach, there will be some form of security there.

And these are all good things. The problem is three-fold:

1- The plans of men are only as good as God allows. Banks fail. Economies fail. Money can be devaluated. Inflation can rob funds of their value. "Sure-fire" investments can dissolve into "sure-flops." It isn't that we aren't to plan. It's only that we are to recognize our place in those plans. Proverbs 16:1 says it all. In the Living Bible, it says this:

We can make our plans, but the final outcome is in God's hands.
(Proverbs 16:1 TLB)

So the best-laid plans of man are at best only to be laid at the feet of a God who holds in His hands the keys to the future.

2- There is no guarantee that you will live long enough to enjoy what you have saved. The most successful planner has one unknown quantity to contend with. Death. He can invest with the skill of a surgeon and succeed with all of his investments, only to find, in a moment, death knocking at the door. All he had pinned his dreams on have become worthless commodities at the bank of eternity.

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Death is the uncontrollable quantity at the end of every equation. Even the most astute of investors cannot change the fact that “it is appointed unto man once to die...and after that, the judgment.”

But there is still one more fly in the ointment of man’s provision for his own security. It is this:

3- All of the physical security in the world will not bring a man happiness or guarantee him eternal life. So the final blow to man’s independence is the reality that life is spiritual, not physical. This world is but a vehicle for us to find God and give Him our lives so He can prepare us for the real life which is yet to come. That means that real security is found only in Jesus Christ. His is the only guarantee worth having.

Man’s security, then, is an illusion at best. It appears to be something it’s not. There is a second major illusion. It is the illusion of self-worth. Now please don’t tune me out, at least not yet. There is a valid concept of self-worth, but it is not the one the world is teaching. It is not the one the world’s counselors are telling us is responsible for all of our problems. Jesus dealt quite completely and quite conclusively with this issue. It is *His precepts* rather than the world’s concepts that we need to address. We will watch the Master address it in this study of the life of God on earth.

Our lesson is entitled: “I am not worthy.” (The lower case letters are there intentionally.)

Our outline looks like this:

I- Comin’ Down the Mountain

II- Lord, He’s Worthy!

III- Lord, I’m not worthy!

IV- As You Have Believed!

I- COMIN’ DOWN THE MOUNTAIN

Jesus has just concluded His sermon on the mountainside. It was, to say the least, the most important single Bible class He ever taught. For the first time, and in some cases, the only time in His ministry that He taught specifically the difference between the Kingdom of God and the kingdoms of this world. Everything He said was monumental. Nothing He said was incidental. In this brief explanation of eternity, God on earth overturned virtually

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every religious concept man had ever concocted and replaced it with a word from God that was 180 degrees different. Jesus had just taken all of man's *natural* religious philosophy and replaced it with God's *supernatural* theology. The result was a stunned band of followers following God down the side of a mountain back into the real world.

That, is where the truth of God really has to be tried, in the fire of reality. Jesus could have stayed forever on that hillside holding Sunday School classes, and His followers could have become hoarse from crying, "Amen!" But at some point in time, the Master had to send the troops back into the battle, armed with their new arsenal of spiritual ammunition and let them prove for themselves that "blessed are the meek; blessed are the peacemakers; blessed are they which hunger and thirst after righteousness." It was time to find out if "turning the other cheek" really worked. It was time to see if they really could "love their enemies and pray for those who despitefully used them and persecuted them and said all manner of evil against them falsely." It was time to leave the classroom and head for the battlefield. It was time to put feet to their doctrine.

Unless the Christian learns that the emotional highs and the intellectual gems of the mountaintops are only to equip him for the cannon fire of life, he will begin to develop a theology that implies that the actual experience of teaching or the actual experience of worshipping or the actual experience of fellowship is an end within itself. He will learn that the more he learns doesn't mean the more spiritual he is. Remember, Beloved, *knowledge in and of itself puffeth up* (it swelleth the head). It is only when knowledge is turned into wisdom through obedience that what you have learned becomes worthwhile. Peter, James and John didn't understand that on the Mount of Transfiguration, either. They wanted to build three tabernacles and live in the sheer ecstasy of that moment, but it didn't work. That spiritual high point of their lives was not to become an idol in itself. They were only there to have enough of God's majesty revealed so that when they got down to the dust and dirt of the real world, their hearts might not forget why they were there.

You are here, or wherever you get fed spiritually, primarily to become equipped to do the work of the ministry. There's nothing wrong with the mountaintops of life, so long as you do not try to build tabernacles and stay there. But you and I must learn

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to come down the mountain effectively, or we will not effectively change our worlds. In Jesus' life, as well as in ours, *just after the mountaintops*, the tests often come quickly. Thus, we take up reading in Matthew 8 and Luke 7 from "The Life of Christ in Stereo", a harmony of the gospels:

¹And when he had come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed him, ³and he went into Capernaum.

Now a certain slave boy, who belonged to a centurion and was very dear to him, was sick and at the point of dying. And the centurion, on hearing of Jesus ¹when he came into Capernaum, ³sent to him some of the elders of the Jews, begging him to come and heal his servant, ¹and saying, "Lord, my servant is at the house, lying paralyzed, in terrible torment."

³And when they came to Jesus, they besought him urgently, saying that he was worthy to have this done for him, "for he loves our nation, and built us our synagogue." ¹Jesus said, "I will come and heal him." ³So Jesus went with them.

(¹Matthew 8:1,5-7; ³Luke 7:1b-6 TLOCIS)¹

II- HE IS WORTHY

It didn't take long. It never does. Jesus' feet had barely touched the soil of the foot of the mountain before people arrived with problems to solve...*real problems*. There are, you know, two kinds of problems: *real problems*, that is, needs that need to be met; and *imagined problems*, circumstances viewed through the lens of self-pity, designed to get attention. Those with real problems will listen, learn and leave. Those with imagined problems (and don't get me wrong, they are real to them), will sniffle, sob and stay. They aren't there for *solutions*, but for *attention*. Jesus devoted His life on earth to meeting *real needs*; touching lives that wanted help.

It was such a need that surfaced the other side of the mountain. We read that when He had come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed Him. So the Master had no privacy from the first moment. Great crowds went wherever He went, and He went to Capernaum. God always gravitated toward real needs.

An interesting entourage greeted the Master in Capernaum. Some of the elders of the Jews were there on behalf of one of their more prominent citizens. Let's look at their hero. For one thing,

¹ The Life of Christ in Stereo: The Four Gospels Speak in Harmony; by Johnston M. Cheney; © 1969 Western Conservative Baptist Seminary, Portland, Oregon

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he was a centurion. Now the word “centurion” comes from two Greek words. One means “a hundred”. The second means “to command.” Thus, centurion means a commander of a hundred men. Originally it only meant one who commanded a hundred at a time, but later came to signify anyone over a division, whether it consisted of a hundred or less. At least three centurions are mentioned in the New Testament: this one, the one at the cross and Julius, who escorted Paul to Rome. So the first thing that came to light about this one who had a need was that he was a man of great authority. He wasn’t a “nobody.” In fact, the reason these Jewish leaders came for Jesus to heal his servant was that he was worthy to have this done for him.

Now this phrase is important to this whole passage because it so contrasts man’s philosophy with God’s. Man’s philosophy placed this man on a pedestal because of his position and because of his possessions. The interesting thing is that Jesus did not bother to address their shallowness. He was not about to help the man based on who he was; but, praise God, neither was He about to ignore his needs because of who he was. To Jesus, he was just another man with a definite need and an opportunity hung in the balance for God to be glorified.

III- LORD, I’M NOT WORTHY!

Enter now the character of the man involved. Let’s read what happened next:

³But when he was now not far from the house, the centurion, ¹in answer, ³sent friends to him, telling him, “Trouble not, Lord, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof—for which reason I thought myself unfit to come to you. Instead, speak but a word, and my servant will be healed. For I, too, am a man invested with authority, and have soldiers under myself and I say to one, ‘Go’ and he goes, and to another, ‘Come’ and he comes, and to my slave boy, ‘Do this,’ and he does it.” (Luke 7:6-8 TLOCIS)

Four things stand out about this man’s request from Jesus, now no longer filtered through the lens of the Jewish leaders.

1- His request was not for himself. It was not a plea for God to remove a problem that was hindering him from greatness. It was not even a plea for God to make his life more comfortable. It was not, in fact, a plea for God to do anything for him. It was a heartbroken cry for help for someone else.

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2- His request was for someone the world counted worthless. Here the elders were pleading with God to help the centurion because he was somebody special. But the centurion himself was asking God to heal someone the world didn't even count as worth counting...a slave. A slave, we might add, who was very dear to him.

3- His request was submerged in an attitude of faith. "All You have to do, Lord, is speak a word and my servant will be healed. For I, too, am a man invested with authority and have soldiers under myself, and I say to one, 'Go' and he goes." This man understood the concept of authority and therefore, he understood the concept of faith. Beloved, find a man or woman who cannot grasp the principles of authority, and you will find a man or woman who cannot demonstrate real faith. This is true because faith is assurance under authority. Faith is acting on what you cannot see based on the authority of one who gave you his word. This centurion understood authority and therefore he could grasp believing something because he believed in someone. Mark it...those who cannot submit to authority can seldom operate in the realm of faith. The two are inseparable.

4- Finally, notice the man's humility. In contrast to the elders' description of him, the centurion's reason for sending for help, rather than going himself, was not because he was too good to make the trip, but because he felt unworthy to be in the presence of God's greatness. He said, "Lord, I am not worthy to have You come under my roof—for which reason I thought myself unfit to come to You. Instead, speak a word and my servant will be healed." He had every reason from the world's perspective to demand help from God.

a) He was an important man in the country. Helping him would give God a good platform from which to promote Himself (or so the world says).

b) He was an important man in the synagogue. This guy probably not only had his name on stickers in the front of the hymnbooks, he no doubt had a building or two named in his honor. He was, perhaps, the underwriter of the plant itself, and no small man in the eyes of the Jewish leaders.

c) He was a benevolent man. He was expending all this energy to ask God to help someone who didn't even have the right to own property...a nobody.

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But this centurion did not appeal to God based on who he was. He appealed to God based on who God was. Beloved, learn the difference between those two things, and you are on the threshold of greatness in learning to pray. Now I do not believe that this man had what the world would call a “negative self-image.” I just don’t believe it. He was a man of great stature and of great authority. He just said, “Go,” and people went. He said, “Come,” and the troops came running. He said to this very slave boy, “Do this,” and it was all but done. I doubt that this man lived in a prison house of self-pity or self-degradation. I can imagine that he was a man who quietly understood who he was and accepted himself for who he was.

But when he looked at himself in the light of who God was, he fell on his face in utter unworthiness and humility and cried out to the King of kings, “I am not even worthy to have You come under my roof.” “Lord, I’m not fit to have You sit in my house.” I am not worthy.

Now the world would scorn that kind of self-abasement, because the world believes that we are all gods in the making and that any deity, if there be one, is there to serve us. The world believes in man’s intrinsic self-worth. To cry out, “I am not worthy,” would be to display an unhealthy self-image that demanded repeated trips to the counselor’s couch to find the cause of such negative thinking. But Jesus repeatedly imprinted on the scrolls of Scripture, God’s perspective of self. Man, when indwelt by a Holy God, was of inestimable value. But man, operating apart from that God, was useless, helpless and worthless. Jesus Himself, performing as man indwelt by God, said of Himself, “I can of Mine own self do nothing.” And Jesus had never sinned! My friend, to develop your self-worth apart from what you became at Calvary is a supreme exercise in futility! Ah! But in Christ, you are a king. In Christ, you are a priest. In Christ, you are an heir of God, a joint-heir with Christ. In Christ, all the riches of the heavenlies are yours. In Christ, all of eternity is yours. You are a jewel in the eyes of a holy God. You are a precious jewel worthy of redemption at the highest price ever paid.

But what makes you so valuable is God. You are valuable because of who made you. Only when you become re-inhabited by Him does your value return. And listen...that value will grow in intensity so long as you do not misread it and come to believe that though God may have saved you when you were nothing,

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now He needs you because you are something. Your value in Christ will be proportionate to the humility with which you see yourself alongside His holiness.

“Lord, I am not worthy!” Did that mean he was not worthy to have his prayers answered? Did that mean he was not worthy to ask for the boy to be healed? No. No. No. Jesus commended this man’s confidence and boldness because he not only believed Jesus could heal the lad, he believed Jesus could do it *in absentia!* What it meant was that his request was based solely on who Jesus was, not on who he was. In fact, it was based on who Jesus was...in spite of who he was. Beloved, this man understood the holiness of God. He understood that though he himself was a man of authority in this world, in the spirit world all authority belongs to God.

He did not have a negative self-image. He simply had an incredibly healthy image of God. And that image of God generated two things: humility and faith. It generated humility because the more clearly he saw who Jesus was, the more he saw how undeserving he was. But it generated faith because the more he saw who Jesus was, the more he knew that there was nothing this man Jesus could not do.

IV- AS YOU HAVE BELIEVED

The elders were impressed with the man’s credentials. Everyone was but the man himself. He was only impressed with God’s credentials...and next to the Master, he had none. So the key to humility is not the adaptation of a saccharin sweet kind of piety that refuses to see reality as it is on this earth. It isn’t putting yourself down so someone else can disagree with you. That’s pride in reverse. No, real humility is the essence of seeing yourself as you look when you stand alongside God. And then it is being so enthralled with what you have seen of God, that you do not belittle yourself. You forget yourself and focus the lens of your life on no one but Jesus Christ.

The Master was impressed. Not with the man’s position, but with his faith. The passage concludes:

³Now when Jesus heard these things, he marveled at him and turning to the multitude behind him, said, ¹“Verily, I say to you, not even in Israel have I found such extraordinary faith! And I say to you, that many shall come from the east and west and dine with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in

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the Kingdom of Heaven; but the sons of the Kingdom shall be cast out into the outer darkness, where there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.”

Then said Jesus to the centurion, “Go and as you have believed, so be it to you.” So his servant was healed at that hour, ³and the messengers, when they returned to the house, found the slave boy completely well.

(¹Matthew 8:10-13, ³Luke 7:9,10 TLOCIS)

Jesus uses the occasion to explain the coming of the gospel to the Gentiles, then turns and pays this man one of the greatest compliments God Himself ever paid to anyone. He said, “Not even in Israel have I seen faith like this.” Then He quietly did what the man had asked Him to do. He healed the boy completely. We know nothing of the boy’s faith. We know nothing of the boy, period. We only know that the boy had a loving master who cared enough about him to humble himself in the presence of God Himself and plead for help. Jesus made no effort to deal with the boy’s slavery. Real freedom would be his in another kingdom. The Master was dealing with eternal issues, the issues of the kind of humility required to see God, and the kind of faith that kind of humility generates. The result was astounding.

Let’s get one thing straight. The key is not man’s perspective of himself. You can have a healthy concept of yourself and still not perceive the greatness of God. Or, you can have a concept of yourself so low that a snake can’t crawl under it and still not perceive the greatness of God. The issue isn’t how you feel about yourself at all. The issue is how aware you are of the greatness of your God.

When you call the name of Jesus, Beloved, the courts of heaven stand still. He is the Omnipotent One who can but speak and hydrogen bombs become as useless as cap pistols. He is the Omniscient One who not only knows your yesterdays and your tomorrows, but who holds in His heart the knowledge of every thought you have ever thought. He is the Righteous One who cannot look upon nor tolerate any compromise with sin or evil. He is the Gracious One who saw us in our helplessness and gave us all of Himself so that we might never again have to struggle against the enemy without the power to overcome. He is the Prince of Peace who speaks to raging seas until the waves withdraw in honor of His Word. He is the I AM who always has been, is now and ever shall be. And if you can comprehend those

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facts and still consider yourself worthy to stand in His presence clothed in anything but His righteousness alone, you simply do not understand whose presence you are in!

This centurion understood. He understood God's authority, so he said, "Lord, speak but a word and my servant will be healed." He also understood that in light of that kind of authority, he was nothing. So he cried out, "Lord, I am not worthy to have You come under my roof." His humility generated faith. His faith touched the heart of God. His servant was healed. He himself was blessed of God. The elders were taught a lesson in godliness. And the King of Eternity was glorified.

Oh, that we could perceive God as this man did. So many of us do not know how to worship. We lack respect. We lack awe. We lack humility. We act as though we have come to do God a favor by favoring Him with our presence in His house. And maybe we'll honor Him further by giving Him a token gift from our treasure house of riches. Fools.

God does not need our presence. We need His presence. God does not need the church. The church needs Him. Only as we adopt the mindset of this centurion will we ever truly adopt the mind of Christ. Is it because when we look in the mirror we do not like ourselves? God forbid. No, it is because when we look at Jesus, we do not so much as think of ourselves. Our minds are totally absorbed with the honor of being His. And we are so in awe of who He is, quietly our hearts cry out in humility, "I am not worthy, Lord."

It is then, Beloved, that our faith begins to grow.

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An Assignment on Worthiness

1- Why do you think the world is so intent on developing the “self-worth” of man? How do you see those concepts as different from God’s concept of self-worth?

2- What reason did the Jewish leaders give Jesus to justify that this man was “worthy” of having his request granted? How do we unconsciously use these same measuring sticks today?

3- What do you see in this man’s statements that outline the depth of his character? What character qualities do you see emerge from his comments? Does this say anything to you about how our requests to God surface the real character of our hearts?

4- Do you think this centurion would have been considered to have a low self-image today? Was he overly impressed with himself? Did he demonstrate false humility?

5- Why do you think he felt unworthy to have Jesus come to his house?

6- What do you see in this passage to demonstrate the relationship between humility and faith? Make a list of the men and women of God in Hebrews 11 who demonstrated great faith. Tracing their history in the Scripture, see how many times their humility surfaced as a prerequisite to their faith.

7- Spend some time this week alone with God asking Him to grant you a correct assessment of who you are in Christ. Ask Him to teach you through the Scripture to enter His presence with the same mindset as this centurion. Learn to focus on His worthiness as you pray.

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