

Luke 7:1-10

Aim of lesson

To show the centurion's outstanding faith in the authority of Jesus, and to show how Jesus recognized it.

Background study

Find out details about the Roman occupation of Palestine, the composition of the army and the attitudes that prevailed. Refer to a map showing the position of Capernaum. Find illustrations of a Jewish synagogue and Roman military dress.

Suggested outline of lesson

Roman occupation of Palestine

Begin by talking about the Roman occupation of Palestine. Roman soldiers were a common sight in every town, with their colourful uniforms and gleaming armour. The Jews resented their presence, not only because they were subject to Roman rule, but because they had to pay heavy taxes to these overlords. Some of the Romans were very cruel, and the soldiers rough and arrogant. There were, however, some exceptions.

An unusual Roman centurion

Introduce the centurion, an officer in charge of one hundred soldiers, who was based in the seaside town of Capernaum to which Jesus was a frequent visitor. Far from being unpopular, the centurion was highly regarded by the local Jews because he wielded his authority with kindness and with great respect for the Jewish way of life. Furthermore, he had provided the town with a synagogue, where the people could meet to worship and to hear the scriptures read. Thus he was, in fact, regarded as a friend. He had acquainted himself with the beliefs of the Jews and had, no doubt, also heard of the preaching and miracles of Jesus. Explain that one day the centurion hurriedly approached the Jewish elders. He seemed anxious and concerned; something was troubling him. He spoke earnestly and was clearly asking something of them. They nodded their heads and then walked away quickly. They set off purposefully and hastened to the place where they knew they would find Jesus. At this point, explain the object of their mission. Jesus was impressed as they spoke highly of the Roman and pleaded on his behalf. Convey the genuine affection that the centurion felt for his servant, and the good relationship which existed between the elders and the Roman. Jesus did not hesitate and went with them straight away, but before they reached the house they were intercepted by friends of the centurion.

The centurion's amazing faith

The centurion understood the beliefs of the Jews, that they should not associate with Gentiles. Far from being arrogant, this man was humble enough and sensitive enough to recognise that Jesus, being a Jew, should not enter his home. Neither did he presume to exert his authority, but rather beseeched Jesus for help, via his friends. Moreover, the centurion saw no necessity for Jesus to actually touch the sick man, or even to see him, but believed that his power was such that only a word was needed. He acknowledged the truth, which many of the Jews could not or would not see, that here among them was one who had the power and authority of God. The centurion knew about authority, from his own experience, and recognized it in Jesus. Jesus marvelled at the man's confidence in him and commented upon it to the crowd. Jesus acknowledged that a man with faith like that deserved his help, even if he were a Roman, and he agreed to the suggestion.

Relevance to the children's lives

Why was Jesus amazed at the message he received from the centurion's friends? The distance between Jesus and the sick man did not prevent him from curing him. Jesus is now in heaven. How can we get a message to him when we are worried about ourselves or someone we love? If we believe that he can help us, he will.

Ask the children what they think the final outcome was. Then help them to see the effect of Jesus' compassion and healing power upon all those concerned.

Worksheets

The code reads 'Faith is being sure of what we hope for'.

Prayer

Dear Lord God, please help us to know that Jesus is very near, even though we cannot see him, and that he will help us. Amen.

Memory verse

"Pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man has great power as it is working" (James 5:16).