



Lessons in Authority

The scars on Maximus's back always ached on cold days, and today was a very cold day. But he paid no attention to the pain from his back. All of Maximus's attention was bent on the form lying on the mat on the floor: his servant, Julius, who struggled to breathe, who labored to suck in air and push it out.

Julius was dying.

Maximus understood authority – he was a centurion; how could he not? Of course in his younger days, he had, ah, a little bit of a hard head and *maybe* he still had a little bit of a hard head, but he had learned to obey authority the hard way. The scars on his back – lessons in pain – he had learned to obey.

And Julius knew that lesson, too. Well, all of Maximus's soldiers did. When Maximus commanded a soldier to do something, he did it. But his servant, Julius, when he gave a command, Julius obeyed quickly and well.

The truth was Maximus loved Julius, like the son that he never had. And now he was dying.

Maximus knew someone who could heal him. Maximus was no fool. When that healer, Jesus, had set up his center of operations here in Capernaum, he had investigated. He had learned all of the healing that Jesus had done in all of the places and even here in town. And the stories were true – there was no doubting that.

But Maximus was Roman. Julius was Roman. And this Jesus, he was Jewish. Maximus knew their religion. He respected it greatly. And maybe there was more than a kernel of truth in it. But that also meant that because Maximus wasn't Jewish, he wasn't worthy.

There was something else. Everyone learned to obey authority the hard way. They learned by disobeying. But this Jesus... He never disobeyed. The simple truth was Maximus wasn't worthy to even speak to Jesus. But for Julius?

Maybe.

He calls to his friends, the Jews that he has befriended here in Capernaum, "Please, my friends, go and speak to Jesus. Please. Speak to him on behalf of my servant."

And they go.

Maximus paces as he waits. And the breathing in the next room, labored inhalation, phlegmy air pushed out – and silence.

No.

Breathe in!

Breathe in!

And Julius does. Finally, after too long, he breathes in.

And something clicks: Jesus has authority. He doesn't even have to come here. He doesn't have to sully himself by walking into this Roman's home.

Maximus calls a messenger. "Quickly! Go! Run to Jesus and tell him – tell him, 'Lord, don't trouble yourself, for I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. That's why I didn't even consider myself worthy to come to you. But say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, 'Go,' and he goes. And that one, 'Come,' and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it."

The servant sprints out the door, and Maximus waits.

Julius coughs and is silent. Maximus closes his eyes. He walks out of the room. And then he hears footsteps.

He turns and sees Julius standing in the doorway, a smile on his face. "Master, I'm better!"

And Maximus laughs, because Jesus has authority, and he used it to heal his servant.

Brothers. Sisters. You who are listening.

Jesus still has authority. And this is how he uses his authority: he laid it down, so that by his wounds you could be healed. And he still uses his authority in your life, to guide the whole world for your good.

And this story is true.

Luke 7:1-10

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