

Jesus Heals the Centurion's Servant

Matthew 8:5-13; Luke 7:1-10

Our chronological study of Christ begins Volume 4 sandwiched between two very interesting and similar verses from the book of Matthew. (Matthew 4:23; 9:35) The chapters between these two verses overview the early to middle ministry of Jesus – teaching, preaching, and healing among the masses. With the ending of Volume 3, we finished a wonderful example of His teaching ministry in the Sermon on the Mount, and now we move forward with a series of healings and other preaching opportunities.

The Sermon on the Mount was over. Christ had made it very clear what characteristics those in His kingdom would have, a heart of humility, love, faith, and obedience toward God. ([Beatitudes; love – 5:44; commitment – 6:24; faith – 6:30; obedience – 7:24](#)) Now Jesus returns to the city of Capernaum with His newly chosen twelve disciples. The Gospel writers will move forward in the narrative of Christ's life with the various responses to Jesus found among the people. We find outsiders, outcasts, and the lowly receive forgiveness and healing but the proud and self-righteous miss out on the blessings of God and turn into a hateful, murderous clan.

Harmonizing the Differences between Matthew and Luke:

- Differences – **Matthew** – seems a bit more dramatic but concise - tells of the specifics of the illness; he deals with the interaction between Jesus and the centurion as if the two talked
Luke – more literal to the details of the events – highlights the involvement of the Jewish elders and the centurion's good relationship with those of Capernaum
- Similarities – The centurion's humble faith was central to both narratives. The fact that Jesus was amazed by his faith was also similar.
- Resolutions between passages – Really, common sense is your best ally in this situation. When we hear that the President made an announcement, it is possible the Commander and Chief went before cameras and spoke, but more likely, a well-dressed spokesman handled it for the President. Regardless of who said it, if it was delegated by the President, it was just as if he had said it. This is the same principle. The Jewish elders from the book of Luke were sent on a mission from the centurion, they spoke what was the desire of the Roman leader and added commendation to Jesus concerning his care for their city. (other examples of similar differences - John 4:1-2; 19:1; Mark 10:35/Matthew 20:20) Luke adds details Matthew left out, but both carry the main thrust of the event and Christ's wonderful amazement.

I. Jesus' Help Sought by Centurion

“Now when he had ended all his sayings in the audience of the people, he entered into Capernaum. ²And a certain centurion's servant, who was dear unto him, was sick (“lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented.” Matthew 8:6), and ready to die. ³And when he heard of Jesus, he sent unto him the elders of the Jews, beseeching him that he would come and heal his servant. ⁴And when they came to Jesus, they besought him instantly saying, That he was worthy for whom he should do this: ⁵For he loved our nation, and he hath built us a synagogue.” Luke 7:1-5

“Capernaum” – This ancient city on the north end of the Sea of Galilee had a great privilege, for Jesus the Messiah had chosen it to be the home base and center of His ministry. Jesus spent a great deal of time in this city and its surrounding suburbs, and we find many miracles and teachings of Christ around this area. But ultimately, they will be full of unbelief. (Matthew 11:23) Yet, we find, like in this incident, there were some who believed, even Gentiles.

“centurion” – A centurion was a soldier but had to be gifted as an administrator and supervisor as well. Historians believe centurions were really the backbone of the Roman Empire. An efficient officer was well compensated. They not only had to care for their assigned post, but also command about 100 men, seek to keep the peace with the locals, and always be aware and carry out the wishes of their superiors.

This man was a historical person who served under Herod Antipas in the city of Capernaum. Despite his position and power, he was a good man. In fact, all three times the New Testament tells of a centurion, they gave evidence of good character and genuine faith in Christ. (Matt. 27; Acts 10) Several scholars I read did not believe this centurion was a Jewish proselyte but one who understood the person and power of Jesus.

How did this centurion learn of Christ? It was his job! Jesus was drawing large crowds in Capernaum and the surrounding areas. Christ was known for His miracles including two local healings – the Nobleman’s son (John 4) and the paralyzed young man brought by four friends (Mark 2). The centurion probably knew the Nobleman and with his servant being paralyzed he would have found hope that perhaps Jesus could also heal his slave.

He had no connection to God necessarily:

- but the centurion did have **compassion** for his young servant. Perhaps the slave was especially efficient or showed wisdom and loyalty not often found in servants. Whatever it was, the servant had found favor in the sight of his powerful owner.
- but had a close **positive relationship with the local Jewish leadership**. He had built a synagogue for them, and they were willing to intercede to Jesus and spoke well of him.
- but was **very humble**. This centurion seemed to understand the mindset of the Jews and he was willing to submit to it. Example – the defilement Christ might feel coming into his Gentile house.
- but had **amazing faith in Christ**. Both his words and actions demonstrated this. Use of the word “Lord” when addressing Jesus – recorded in Matthew (2x – v. 6, 8) and Luke (1x – v. 6). Though powerful, rich, and naturally self-sufficient, he humbly came to Jesus, a lowly Jewish rabbi.

“servant” – When looking at the Greek, Bible scholars believe this slave was a young man – even some said a “boy” – so we can surmise he was in his mid to late teens. The word “dear” means highly esteemed, precious, appreciated, and honored. He must have been a wonderful young man if this military leader, one who worked with young men all the time, counted him so valuable! Please remember, many came to Christ to advocate for their children, but this centurion came for his slave!

“sick” – It’s Matthew who gives us more information about the illness, rather than Doctor Luke! “palsy, grievously tormented” – means paralyzed (a condition no doctor could correct) and suffering terribly. These words highlight the extreme condition this servant was in. The experienced military man would have known time was short if something radical didn’t happen very soon. Luke tells us simply he was “ready to die” in the Greek this statement highlights the fact the servant had been in this state for some time already.

“elders of the Jews” – In our society, we cannot understand the multiple abnormal events happening within this incident of Jesus. Not only do we have a Roman military leader acting with compassion toward a slave and seeking out a Jewish traveling Rabbi, but now Jewish leaders from the locale ruled by the centurion intercede to Jesus, one whom many of them didn’t like or at least was suspect of. Be aware, that Jesus and these leaders would have known each other and very likely have interacted before, probably not always positively. Jesus would have taught and read in their synagogue; they would not have been strangers to one another.

“besought him instantly” – In Greek, this phrase carries the thought of the intensity and earnestness of the Jewish leadership who came to Jesus – they begged and pleaded that He should come quickly. These elders were forced to work with this centurion and had found in him a wonderful friend. I love the phrase they used, “he was worthy” for this miraculous healing and that he “loveth our nation.” The centurion had proved it by building a synagogue. There seemed to be mutual admiration and respect from both the elders and the centurion based on actions and attitudes.

Capernaum synagogue – If you travel to the ruins of Capernaum today, you will see a synagogue. Though it is not from the one built by this centurion, many believe the location and maybe even some of the ornate details were copied from the original one built during the life of Christ spoken of here in our passage.

II. Jesus’ Power Realized by Centurion

“(“And Jesus saith unto him, I will come and heal him.” Matthew 8:7) Then Jesus went with them. And when he was now not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to him, saying unto him, Lord, trouble not thyself (cliché - “don’t skin yourself”): for I am not worthy that thou shouldest enter under my roof: ⁷ Wherefore neither thought I myself worthy to come unto thee: but say in a word (“but speak the word only,” Matthew 8:8), and my servant shall be healed.” Luke 7:6-7

“I will come and heal him,” – These are very strong words in Greek – action and emotion! This phrase is a promise to the centurion. It is full of control and authority – I can and will come and heal – and with that, Jesus left for the centurion’s house.

“I am not worthy that thou shouldest enter under my roof:”/“neither thought I myself worthy to come unto thee:” – Some scholars said this might have been a “plan B” for the centurion. He asked Jesus to come and heal but now, perhaps realizing the defilement his home might cause Jesus, sends another message, “don’t come, I’m not worthy, but just speak the word and heal him.”

“but say in a word”/“speak the word only,” – It is recorded Jesus did miracles from afar three times – Syro-phenician woman’s daughter (Matthew 15); a Nobleman’s son (John 4); and this event. It is actually a principle of God – He speaks and miracles can happen! Gen. 1:3; Psalm 33:9; 148:5; Luke 4:36; John 11:43

The centurion was a career soldier. He thought like a soldier, acted like a soldier, and talked like a soldier. Here, in his statements to Jesus, he lays out his military, rational, reasoning behind the statement, “speak the word only.” We will also gain insights into his faith in Jesus as we study.

“For I also am a man set under authority, having under me soldiers, and I say unto one, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it.” Luke 7:8

Centurion's Military Reasoning –

This officer understood levels of **authority** and with it the power of a spoken command. (v. 8) This was key to the centurion's faith journey. He knew Jesus had the power to heal probably based on reliable sources or personal observation. The illness, injuries, and even demons, were under Jesus' authority! Like these, he was "also" under authority (v. 8), with superiors giving him orders just as he gave orders to those under his command. With this in mind, the centurion confidently told Jesus to just speak the word of authority to the illness tormenting his slave, "and my servant shall be healed" (v.7). This man had remarkable faith in the person and authority of Christ. This is something the disciples still struggled with as we look ahead in Matthew 8:26-27. Unfortunately, the Jewish and Religious leaders will lead the whole nation in unbelief in the person and work of Christ. Most never saw or rationalized the works and words of Jesus Christ as this centurion did. **Prophets prophesied a miracle worker + Messenger from God = Jesus the great miracle worker + teacher** (John 10:25-26, 37-38; 12:37; 14:10-11)

The centurion had learned to trust the power of Christ – we must also!

2 Corinthians 5:7 "For we walk by faith, not by sight."

"How to walk by faith and not sight" adapted from Christianity.com

1. Surrender ourselves to God – lives, time, schedule, children, job – all things!
Rom. 12:1
2. Focus on our Eternal Home – Heaven is our home, earth is just the journey. Life is hard, often confusing, unexpected, lonely, and sad. We can often feel like we are blind or walking in darkness, but we can trust our Guide. Isaiah 42:16
3. Stand on God's Promises – love, protection, guidance, peace, truth, beauty for ashes

III. Jesus Marveled by Centurion

"When Jesus heard these things, he marveled at him, and turned him about, and said unto the people that followed him, ("Verily" Matthew 8:10) I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel." Luke 7:9

"he marveled at him," – We are only told Jesus "marveled" or was amazed twice during His ministry, here at the centurion's faith, and in Nazareth at His hometown's unbelief (Mark 6:6).

"turned him about, and said unto the people that followed him," – Realize the scene, as Christ hears of the great believing faith of the centurion, He swings around and addresses those who are closest to Him – probably the newly chosen twelve disciples.

"I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel." – Jesus purposefully illustrates this man's faith compared to the faithlessness of Israel. Matthew will go on and insert the next phrase for his Jewish readers. (v. 11-12)

"And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. ¹² But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Matthew 8:11-12

Jesus Gives Two Truths that Must be Understood: Christ will use this opportunity to teach His followers, probably the newly chosen twelve, essential truths concerning those who will be part of the kingdom.

Gentiles and the Kingdom – I love the word “many” found in Matthew 8:11 – **that’s us** as Gentile believers! From east and west, or we might say, the four corners of the world, the Gentiles will come to a believing faith in Christ, just as this centurion. Jesus now says something that could have been very disturbing to those listeners. He says these “many” Gentiles will sit down at **their Jewish** special table – the table awaiting them, **their Jewish banquet table** that was to celebrate the kingdom with **their Messiah** and the great patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob! Rom. 3:29; 15:9-12; Eph. 2:11-20

Jews and the Kingdom – Just as Christ highlights the Gentile involvement in the kingdom, He also tells of the surprising lack of the Jew's participation! The phrase “children of the kingdom” would be understood by everyone listening as the children of Israel. Those who trusted in their Judaism – their religion, with its traditions, feasts, and laws! Jesus gives a very bleak description of them being thrown out, away from the light of God, into utter darkness. The Greek is very clear and emphasizes the emotional reality of those left out of God’s kingdom! Five times the New Testament will use the phrase “weeping and gnashing of teeth.” English readers see action verbs but in the Greek language, these words are full of emotion! “Weeping” is sorrow – intense, overwhelming sadness – heart and soul grief, but “gnashing of teeth” is anger, bitterness, and rebellion! It’s a picture of a fest raised up in the face of God, and a heart full of hatred, and unbelief. Even in hell, the unbeliever will not believe they deserved their fate, they will stand in rebellion and unbelief and hatred toward God for eternity! Later in His ministry, Jesus said much the same in Luke 13:27-30. The Jews had to understand not only were there coming many Gentiles into the kingdom but also the fact that their Jewish birth and heritage would not gain them entrance into the kingdom but only faith in the person and work of Jesus!

IV. Jesus Rewards the Faith of the Centurion

“(“And Jesus said unto the centurion, Go thy way; and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee. And his servant was healed in the selfsame hour.” Matthew 8:13) And they that were sent, returning to the house, found the servant whole (completely restored to health) that had been sick.” Luke 7:10

I’ve wanted to highlight the word “worthy” but have waited until now to mention it. It is found four times in our passages which is significant for one word being used so many times by two different Gospel writers. It definitely was a detail of importance within this narrative. When the centurion, speaking of himself, used it, he was speaking in a humble way, meaning he was not fit – unfit to speak to Jesus, unfit to have Jesus come under his roof. (Matt. 8:8; Luke 7:6-7) But when the Jewish elders were talking to Christ, they used the word “worthy” concerning the centurion being fit and deserving of this great miracle based on acts of kindness toward the people (Luke 7:4-5) Same person is being described yet seen as both worthy and unworthy, unfit and fit!

How did Jesus view the centurion? Was or was he not “worthy”? What was the basis of Jesus’ healing of the servant? We find it in Matthew 8:13, Jesus said, “as thou hast **believed**, so be it done unto thee.” And in Luke 7:9 Jesus said, “I have not found so **great faith**, no not in Israel.” The elders had said the centurion’s actions had made him worthy, but Jesus said it was his believing faith! **The wonderful emphasis of this whole event is not the restoration of the servant to health, but instead the great faith of the centurion!** You see, with God, it has never been actions that make us worthy of heaven but it’s always been a humble, faith in the person and work of Christ. This man recognized Jesus was in command of all things and this faith amazed Jesus! Christ will often call out His disciples for their “little faith” or even “faithlessness,” but here, to a Gentile Roman soldier, Jesus commends His “great faith.” These passages finish simply by stating the young slave was healed completely. But don’t miss the significance of this, the healing was not only a reward for the faith of the centurion but also **proved** the object of his faith - the power and authority of Christ!

Believers Application

1. Our home in heaven is dependent on our faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Nothing else will gain us a place at the banquet table with our wonderful Lord. The Jews were wrong in their thinking. They believed their heritage as sons of Abraham automatically gave them a place in heaven with God, but they were sadly mistaken. Like Abraham, they too had to have faith in God, Gen. 15:6 says “And he believed in the Lord; and he counted it to him for righteousness.” Paul used this phrase three times as he wrote in Romans 4. Unfortunately, the world is full of people who have never heard the **truth of the Bible!** They have heard religious teachings and believed in religious traditions, but error has crept into religion as men have sought to insert their own ways instead of God’s way. Let’s read together the words of Jesus found in the Gospels as He explained the way to heaven. If you are not sure you have based your eternal home in heaven on Christ – then I challenge you to write down these references and reread these verses, study them on your own, and beg God for clarity to the truth of His Word. Millions have walked on this same road of decision, the centurion in this event reasoned the truth of Jesus from what he heard and saw, we have so much more light – the Word of God. I challenge you to seek the truth!

Gospel from Jesus’s Lips

Matthew 20:28 Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.

Mark 2:17 When Jesus heard it, he saith unto them, They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

Mark 16:16 He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.

Luke 19:10 For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.

John 3:3 Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

John 3:14-21 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up. That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.

John 3:36 He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.

John 5:24 Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.

John 10:9-11 I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture. The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly. I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.

John 10:27-30 My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father’s hand. I and my Father are one.

John 12: 46-47 I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness. And if any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world.

John 14:6 Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.

John 17:3 And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.

2. Does your faith cause Jesus to marvel? Like the centurion, we must also have faith in the power of Christ even though Jesus is not physically present with us! We must walk through life trusting Him. The centurion had very little background that helped build his faith, but we have the Holy Spirit living with us, the Word of God to lead us, and examples of saints who have walked in faith before us. It is wonderful to realize we can please God and cause Him to marvel at our faith! Let's commit to living by faith! Proverbs 3:5-6; Hebrews 11:6; I John 5:4

Let me also suggest going through HW #2 Ques. 1. This is a great reminder of how we can please God with our lives.