

## Faith For The One's We Love

### Matthew 8:5-13

#### Introduction

In the next few chapters we see the King in power. Matthew has grouped together 10 miracles to prove to readers that Jesus Christ possessed the powers of a King; but not an ordinary King; but the predicted King. Jesus has power over disease. In verses 1-4 we see Jesus healing a man with severe leprosy. Now Jesus will heal a man of palsy or paralysis (vv.5-13). In this passage we read of a Gentile coming to Jesus for help. There are two instances when Gentiles come to Jesus for help in Matthew's gospel; here and in Matthew 15:21-28. In both cases Jesus heals from a distance.

Some Bible teachers suggest that both the healing of the leper and the healing of the Centurion's servant took place on the same day. The leper was an outcast from both the religious culture and the broader culture. There was a court in the Temple for Gentiles but most Gentiles would be barred from worship and social interaction. If the Gentile converted, was circumcised and ceremonially cleansed, he could participate in the life of the nation. Gentiles were otherwise considered unclean. **For a Jewish Rabbi to even suggest going into a Gentile's home would have raised furrowed brows! I am sure the religious leaders were watching Jesus very closely.**

Luke's gospel gives us additional details. In Luke's account (7:1-10) we discover that this Centurion was greatly loved and admired by the Jews of Capernaum. He had helped them build a synagogue. Jewish friends came to Jesus on behalf of the Centurion—begging help. It would appear that the Centurion sent word ahead; that the Centurion did not consider himself worthy to receive such an esteemed guest in his home (and also provide a cultural accommodation for the Jew loath to enter a Gentile's home). We have every reason to believe the Centurion was wealthy and probably had a spacious home and an entourage of servants. A Centurion was an army officer of Rome. The name means 'charge over 100 soldiers'. A Roman legion had 6,000 men who were divided into 60 centuries. To receive that post and position meant proven leadership; proven battle skills. Judea and the Galilee were occupied territory. Imagine the sentiment the French felt for their German occupiers; or the Germans would feel for their Russian occupiers after WWII. Occupied forces are usually feared and hated. We discover that this Centurion is no ordinary man.

#### Faith In Time Of Crisis (vv.5-6)

*Matthew 8:5-6 (NKJV) Now when Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to Him, pleading with Him,*

*6 saying, "Lord, my servant is lying at home paralyzed, dreadfully tormented."*

Paralysis is a fit symbol for the human soul (see W.H. Griffith Thomas; *Outline Studies in Matthew*; p.110).

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Pleading is a fit word to describe the Centurion's request. What clues do we have concerning the Centurion's character? He has a deep personal interest in his servant's condition. Jon Courson hints ". . . a wealthy Roman approaching a poor Galilean, a powerful Centurion seeking a meek carpenter, a mighty man of war addressing the Prince of Peace" (p.201).

Vance Havner, a Baptist evangelist, related the story of an elderly lady who was greatly disturbed by her many sorrows and troubles both real and imaginary. Finally she was told kindly by her family; "Grandma, we've done all we can do for you. You'll just have to trust God for the rest." A look of utter despair spread over her face as she replied, "Oh dear, has it come to that?" Havner commented, "It always comes to that, so we might as well begin with that!"

In Luke's gospel we read that well meaning Jewish friends pleaded with Jesus on behalf of the noble Centurion. Some people think we go to Church, to the Bible, to Jesus as a kind of last resort. Once we have exhausted all other possibilities, we are forced "to try God". You would think that way some people approach God—they imagine a kind of cosmic God-Father who takes favors only to ask for greater favors in the future. God is not some transcendent philanthropist granting favors to desperate people as a last resort who have no other place to go. The Bible describes God as a loving Father; who deeply cares about you and the people you love!

Both the leper and the Centurion don't really ask for a favor. Both call Jesus "Lord". Both simply state the facts; "you can cleanse me"; "my servant is paralyzed, dreadfully tormented".

How different from the scams and schemes of some so called modern faith teachers and faith teaching that insists you must demand your healing and command faith. Here faith merely talks to Jesus. It would appear that both leper and Centurion have not been schooled in the fine art of asking Jesus for help. Have you ever struggled on just how to ask Jesus for help? What do I say? How do I approach the Lord? I don't even know what to say? It appears that both the leper and the Centurion started with the truth.

A Centurion was the epitome of the self-sufficient person. The Centurion was responsible for discipline and morale. One ancient writer described the character of a centurion this way; "They must not so much be venturesome seekers after danger as men who can command; steady in action, and reliable; they ought not to be over anxious to rush into a fight, but when hard pressed, they must be ready to hold their ground and die at their posts". They were Rome's finest soldiers.

This Centurion seems to genuinely love and care for his servant. This is in itself quite unusual, since many people in the ancient world treated their servants or slaves as little more than "living tools" in the service of their masters. A slave had no rights, and the master was free to treat the slave anyway he or she deemed appropriate. Yet this man loves and cares about a person in defiance of social and cultural norms. **Jesus is attracted to people who love others.** Does that surprise you? Love covers a multitude of sin, and the heart of love is the heart that Jesus finds

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most attractive. Apparently this Centurion is a man of extraordinary love and extraordinary faith. He turns to Jesus in his moment of crisis. Who do you turn to in your moment of crisis? Where will you turn? Where will you place your faith? A.W. Tower wrote; "If our faith is to have a firm foundation we must be convinced beyond any possible doubt that God is altogether worthy of our trust".

Another soldier at a later time wrote; "This is what I found out about religion: it gives you courage to make the decisions you must make in a crisis and the confidence to leave the results to a higher Power. Only by trust in God can a man carrying responsibility find repose" (Dwight D. Eisenhower).

### **Faith In Christ The Lord (v.7)**

*7And Jesus said to him, "I will come and heal him."*

There is a raging debate among Bible scholars about this passage. Does Jesus say "I (myself) am coming to heal him" or "Do you want me to come and heal him?" The grammar or language supports both as a possibility (see Bruner p. 303). In the context and seeing Jesus touch the leper—it may be that Jesus is stating the obvious—"I'll go and heal your servant". This is one of those occasions where grammar and sentence construction seems to emphasize the willingness of Jesus to go. It's as if Jesus is saying, "I don't know what other people have told you in the past, but I myself am willing to do this myself".

Once again Jesus is eager to help. Putting our faith and trust in Jesus is a willingness to believe that He loves us and cares for us. Faith begins and ends with confidence in Jesus Christ. Now the Centurion has Jesus' word. Faith begins when we believe what Jesus says is true and we are willing to act on His word. Faith begins when we put our confidence in the person who makes the promise.

When John Paton was translating the Bible for a South Seas Island tribe, he discovered that they had no word for trust or faith. One day a native who had been running hard came into the missionary's house, flopped himself in a large chair and said, "It's good to rest my whole weight on they chair". "That's it" said Paton. "I'll translate faith as 'resting one's whole weight on God.'"

### **Faith's Confidence (vv.8-9)**

*8The centurion answered and said, "Lord, I am not worthy that You should come under my roof. But only speak a word, and my servant will be healed."*

*9For I also am a man under authority, having soldiers under me. And I say to this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and to another, 'Come,' and he comes; and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it."*

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The Centurion does not consider himself worthy. John the Baptist did not consider himself worthy to baptize Jesus. Interesting—again—the Centurion does not place his confidence in his ability or virtue or goodness—or his ability to generate faith—but rather in the object of his faith; “I am not worthy that You should come under my roof”. Ironically by admitting in humility his unworthiness to have Christ in his home, he makes possible the invitation for Christ to come into his heart! The Roman soldier is unwilling to needlessly offend, he knows Jews are not allowed to go into Gentile homes! The Roman soldier may have been thinking; “It is enough for the Master to simply command it to be so”. Jesus is unwilling to submit to other people’s fears or prejudices concerning cultural contamination! **Jesus is willing to minister to the outsider!**

“*. . .But only speak a word, and my servant will be healed*”. This is perhaps the key expression of faith in the passage; a crude literal translation reads; “just only say a word”. One word—one word from Jesus—and this whole problem goes away. One word from Jesus—the torment—the pain—the paralysis—the disability—the inability goes away. This is the first long-distance healing recorded in the gospels. **It comes from the complete confidence of a Gentile outsider.** Also, it is the confidence of the Centurion—not the confidence—the first who lay sick!!! This man cared deeply about this servant. Do you know what that means? We have permission to care and ask Jesus for help for those we love (and even those we aren’t particularly fond of!)

Look again at verse 9. The Centurion knew how to give and take orders. When a Centurion issued an order, he spoke for the Commander of the Cohort, who spoke for the Emperor. To defy the Centurion was the same as defying the Centurion’s Emperor. When Jesus speaks—He speaks for God. **Don’t make the mistake of believing the Centurion is some country bumpkin with a primitive belief in the miracle power of some poor country preacher. The word Jesus speaks is the “word” from God. This is healing from the highest source—God Himself.** Faith is confidence in the Person in Charge. Faith is confidence in The Authority. This occupation soldier—knew—that if he could command soldiers how much more can Jesus command sickness, command the powers of darkness to disappear! All authority has been given to Jesus Christ. It pleases the Lord when we believe Jesus is capable of doing anything, and that circumstances do not hinder either the power or authority of the Lord Jesus. When the Centurion gave an order, he expected unquestioning obedience. It is the nature of authority and trust, the Centurion knew that his men depended on him for their life!

Jesus is not hindered by distance, or circumstances, or the severity of the disease. Jesus can answer our prayers for the person sitting next to us—as well as the missionary over-seas. Whether absent or present, Jesus was honored when the Centurion expressed his confidence in the Lord Jesus Christ. The whole point is the object of the Centurion’s faith—not the abundance of the faith. Faith is not a force—and your words are not the container of that force! Faith is confidence in the object or thing or person being trusted! Think about it. Thomas did not believe until physical proof was offered. Jesus offered a special blessing for those who have not seen (tangible evidence) and yet believe (John 20:29).

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Do you find it easy or difficult to believe Jesus and trust Jesus? When you are strong and healthy and financially secure do you beg God for health, security, prosperity, blessing? Perhaps—perhaps not. We would do well to trust God for bread—even if we work in a bakery. Do you have faith when you sense His presence—or don't sense His presence? Do you expect from God both the believable and the unbelievable? Do you have more joy in your memories than in your dreams?

### **Faith's Community (vv.10-12)**

*10When Jesus heard it, He marveled, and said to those who followed, "Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!"*

In Mark's Gospel Jesus 'marveled' at the unbelief of the people of Nazareth (Mark 6:6). Now Jesus marvels' at this Gentile Centurion's 'great faith'. Jesus is surprised.

The Gentile soldier did not have the spiritual privileges of the Jews. How often do people with rich spiritual heritages have so little faith—and those with little spiritual heritage have great faith. What is more marvelous? The miracle—or Christ's expression of admiration?

*11And I say to you that many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.*

Note carefully the expression "the kingdom of heaven". Is Jesus speaking about a future in heaven or on the earth? Many come from east and west (the furthest places of pagan culture). In heaven does the believing Gentile receive as much as the believing Jew?

Ancient Jews believed when Messiah comes, there would be a great feast, where all Jews would come from all over the world, in the land of Israel. They believed that Leviathan and Behemoth; the greatest beasts in land and sea would taxi them from these distant lands (there were no airplanes or trains—they remained to be invented). In the ancient writings of the Apocrypha (2 Baruch 29:4) we read; "and behemoth shall be revealed from his place, and leviathan shall ascend from the sea, those two great monsters which I created on the 5th day of creation, and shall have kept until that time; and then they shall be food for all that are left". The Jews believed with all their heart that a great feast would come, but it never occurred to them that Gentiles would be invited to the party! Many Jewish leaders felt certain—in the future kingdom, in the earth, with a restored Israel in the land, and the Messiah ruling—the Gentiles would be destroyed! "The nation and the kingdom that will not serve you shall perish; those nations shall be utterly laid waste" (Isaiah 60:12).

Now Jesus is saying that many will come from east and west and sit down at this banquet! And worse, not only will Gentiles be there, some Jews will be shut out!

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*12But the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."*

This would have been a tragic statement. A son is an heir. Jesus is suggesting that Gentiles as well as Jews will share in God's inheritance. But who would have guessed that Jews would share with unbelieving Gentiles God's punishment? Part of the point that Jesus is making is that all expectations will be reversed! The Jews thought that all Jews would be welcome! Many Jews thought all Gentiles would be unwelcome! "The Jew had to learn that the passport to God's presence is not membership of any nation; it is faith. The Jew believed that he belonged to the chosen people and that because he was a Jew he was therefore dear to God. He belonged to God's *herrenvolk*, and that was enough to automatically gain him salvation. Jesus taught that the only aristocracy in the Kingdom of God is the aristocracy of faith. Jesus Christ is not the possession of any one race of men; Jesus Christ is the possession of every man in every race in whose heart there is faith" (W. Barclay p. 304). Those who would exclude a person from the good news of Jesus Christ on the basis of race, or culture or color, may find themselves in the place of darkness, of weeping and gnashing of teeth.

### **Faith's Consequence (v.13)**

*13Then Jesus said to the centurion, "Go your way; and as you have believed, so let it be done for you." And his servant was healed that same hour.*

Jesus heals a man he has never seen, met or touched! It was not the faith of the Centurion that healed his servant, it was the confidence the Centurion had in Jesus Christ. Jesus declares an amazing principle; the measure of faith is also the measure of blessing. **The fact the servant is healed that same hour—provides proof of what Jesus can do in response to great faith.**

One word from Jesus and the paralysis disappears. One translation reads; "you may go home now, everything has happened, just as you believed" (Bruner; p.307). True faith is confident that Jesus is the Lord. The Bible says; "They that know thy name will put their trust in thee! God's name reveals God's character. The character of God is the final ground of the Christians' assurance. Some people believe that God answered prayer in Bible times but not now! Some people believe miracles happened in those days but not now! But to believe that is to deny or at least ignore the fact that God's character has changed or that Jesus is somehow different today. It seems odd to have to remind myself—and anyone else—that God will always act like God. God will always act—full of love and mercy and compassion. God will act according to His infinite perfections. This truth should be a warning to the enemies of God, and a source of deep consolation for all those who count themselves as friends of God; those who love Him and trust Him and know Him.

We as Christians do not always believe as we should. We become fooled into the lie—that if we had more faith our loved one would be healed or changed. If we had more faith we would have a better job, the bills would be paid or the sickness would go away. Again A.W. Tozer wrote;

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“Faith is not optimism, though it may breed optimism; it is not cheerfulness, though the man of faith is likely to be reasonably cheerful; it is not a vague sense of well being or tender appreciation for the beauty of human togetherness. Faith is confidence in God’s self-revelation as found in the Holy Scriptures.”

### **Conclusion**

Think about what you have read. A Roman soldier, in hostile country, on the outskirts of the Empire; found himself in great need. His beloved servant, hopelessly sick, beyond the skills of Roman or Greek physician. He hears Jesus speak or hears of the healing of a leper. He understands Jesus is the Son of God. He sees and understands more about the nature of Jesus and the authority of Jesus—than even Christ’s closest followers seem to grasp—at least at this point in Jesus’ ministry. **The Centurion believes Jesus will keep His word.**

Faith allows us to see Jesus as He really is. Go as far as you can see. Now go a little further. Judge Robert H. Bork wrote; “religion is declining because those identified with it do not actually believe in it.”

What would happen if one day—you believed—with all your heart—that the Bible’s description about the nature of Jesus and the character of Jesus and the mission of Jesus all proved true?

Faith in Jesus is not really a risk. I read an interesting survey; people over the age of 95 were asked an open-ended question they could answer any way they wished. The question; “If you could live your life over again, what would you do differently?” The three most frequent responses;

1. I would reflect more.
2. I would risk more.
3. I would do more things that would live on after I’m dead.

D.L. Moody used to say; “Trust in yourself and you are doomed to disappointment. Trust in your friends and they will die and leave you. Trust in money and you may have it taken away from you. Trust in reputation and some slanderous tongues will blast. But trust in God and you are never to be confounded in time or in eternity.”