

An Unlikely Faith

Series: The King and His Kingdom (Journey Through Matthew)

Text: Matthew 8:5-13

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Introduction

What impresses Jesus?

Sort of an odd question isn't it? Those of us who strive to have "Big-God" kind of mindset don't typically think of God as being impressed by anything outside of himself, certainly not us.

But in this text, we see that a man that made an impression on Jesus.

Who was this man? A Rabbi? A Scribe? A Disciple? Nope! It was a Roman Soldier.

Let's Read about it in Matthew 8:5-13:

5 When he had entered Capernaum, a centurion came forward to him, appealing to him, 6 "Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, suffering terribly." 7 And he said to him, "I will come and heal him." 8 But the centurion replied, "Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof, but only say the word, and my servant will be healed. 9 For I too am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. And I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes, and to another, 'Come,' and he comes, and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it." 10 When Jesus heard this, he marveled and said to those who followed him, "Truly, I tell you, with no one in Israel have I found such faith. 11 I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, 12 while the sons of the

kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” 13 And to the centurion Jesus said, “Go; let it be done for you as you have believed.” And the servant was healed at that very moment.

The outline will be a little different this morning because there won't really be one. We are going to simply work through the story and draw out lessons and application as we come to them. So, we will look at this in a more verse by verse fashion.

So, let's begin.

Jesus had come down the low mountain area after preaching what would become the most famous sermon in history. He is now coming back into his adopted home of Capernaum. Remember that he had been raised in Nazareth and had initially begun to minister there, but because he was rejected (Luke 4:16-30) in his hometown he moved his ministry base to the Sea of Galilee and the town of Capernaum (Matthew 4:13).

So, while he is on his way home he meets a Roman Centurion.

A Brief Detour: Differences Between Matthew and Luke

Now, at this point we need to briefly look at the differences between Matthew and Luke's accounts.

This is one of those instances where critics might say that the Gospel writers contradict one another.

As I just said, Matthew records that *“a centurion came forward to him, appealing to him.”*

But Luke gives a different account. He says in Luke 7:3-6...

3 When the centurion heard about Jesus, he sent to him elders of the Jews, asking him to come and heal his servant. 4 And when they came to Jesus, they pleaded

with him earnestly, saying, “He is worthy to have you do this for him, 5 for he loves our nation, and he is the one who built us our synagogue.” 6 And Jesus went with them. When he was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends, saying to him, “Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof.

Pretty different huh! In Matthew, the centurion speaks directly to Jesus and in Luke the conversation happens through messengers.

Matthew summarizes the details of how the conversation took place so that he might emphasize its content instead.

It’s not a contradiction, but simply another way of telling the story.

Matthew does this in another place in 27:26: He records that Pilate “had scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified.”

He is compressing again as Pilate didn’t actually whip Jesus personally. He did it through soldiers in charge of this, but since it was done under Pilate’s authority it is as if he carried it out himself.

So, once again, no contradiction here.

We will follow Matthew’s summary account, but reference Luke’s details when it is helpful.

So, who is this Roman Centurion?

A centurion was commander of a century (100 troops). These guys were the backbone of the Roman army, in charge of discipline.

He was likely stationed in Capernaum because it was a trade route and would need to have a police presence from time to time if there were conflicts between merchants.

If you rose to the position of a centurion it meant that you were loyal to Rome and diligent in your work. Thus, the made better money than a common soldier. Consequently, they had a better quality of living that included the ability to hire slaves.

Well, this centurion had a slave whom Luke says was “very dear to him” (KJV). He had gotten sometime kind of terrible illness that led to paralysis. And whatever it was, it was causing him horrible pain and suffering to the point where he was going to die.

Now, Roman soldiers weren’t allowed to marry. So, for the 20+ years of their service they could develop very close relationships with their servants, treating them as family, even viewing them like children.

So, it is not odd for the soldier to show such concern to his slave.

He had heard about Jesus healing others and so he earnestly pleaded with Jesus to come heal his servant.

Jesus’ response came with a compassion that was uncharacteristic for Gentiles to receive from Jews.

v. 7 “I will come and heal him.”

We saw his compassion last week when he was willing to heal an unclean and untouchable leper and now we see it in his willingness come and heal the servant of a man who represented the primary enemy of the Jews.

This becomes even more significant that pious Jews normally did not enter the houses of Gentiles (John 18:28; Acts 10:28).

Jesus practiced what he preached about loving your enemies.

Application: Our message takes on much greater power and influence when our words and our lives match up. People are always watching our lives. Sometimes they are looking for discrepancies to see if we are the real deal. Oh, let us be like Jesus dear friends. He was no hypocrite. He practiced what he preached.

Now, upon hearing that Jesus was coming to his house he panicked a bit. Jesus was holy, but he saw himself as unholy.

Look at vv. 8-9:

8 But the centurion replied, "Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof, but only say the word, and my servant will be healed. 9 For I too am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. And I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes, and to another, 'Come,' and he comes, and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it."

When Jesus heard these words, his face turned contemplative.

You can imagine him being in deep thought for a few silent moments.

He replays the words in his mind, *"Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof..."*

And

"I too am a man under authority." "Just say the word..."

He ponders. He thinks to himself, *"Amazing!"*

Then, as if coming back to the reality of those around him, he makes eye contact with his disciples, the Jews who had brought the message, the centurion's friends....and then in voice loud enough for the crowd to hear, he says, ***"Truly, I tell you, with no one in Israel have I found such faith" (v. 10).***

The word that Matthew used to describe Jesus' "great amazement" is normally used of people who are amazed at things that God is doing.

For instance...

- Joseph & Mary Marveled at Simeon holding their baby Jesus in his arms and prophesying over him (Luke 2:33).
- The Multitudes marveling over the teaching and miraculous works of Jesus (Matthew 9:8; 15:31).
- People are amazed at the disciples' ability to speak in tongues (Acts 2).

- Stephen refers to Moses' amazement at the sight of the burning bush (Acts 7:31).
- But there is another time that Jesus marveled at people. It was when he was rejected in his hometown of Nazareth. Mark 6:6 says, "He marveled at their unbelief."
- **What a contrast!** His own people rejected him, but this outsider, this Gentile ally of the enemy state of Israel, he had faith that outshined anyone in Israel.
- ***Marvelous!***

What Impressed Jesus about the Centurion?

1. He Was Genuinely Humble

He says to Jesus, "I am not worthy to have you come under my roof." This is a Roman Centurion. He is in charge. He represents the most powerful government in the world.

He had come to understand something about who Jesus was; that he was sent by God and had an authority like no one in this world. It was even higher than the Emperor's authority.

Perhaps he didn't fully know why, but when he compared himself to Jesus all he could think was, "I am unworthy, I am nothing."

His Humility was the seed bed that his faith grew out of. For until we come to see that we are nothing and Christ is everything, we will never trust him for anything.

Now let's turn our attention to this faith that Jesus marveled at.

2. He Had Amazing Faith in Christ's Authority

If there is one thing this man understood, it was authority. You didn't get to be a centurion without that.

He believed that the Emperor possessed all authority in the Roman Empire and that he had delegated that authority to his subjects.

So, when the centurion spoke or acted, he was doing it under the emperor's delegated authority.

To obey the centurion was to obey the Emperor. To disobey the centurion was to disobey the emperor.

Now, he just applied this to Jesus. God has all authority in heaven and earth and has sent Jesus with that authority. Therefore, when Jesus speaks and acts, he does so with the authority of God.

So, watch this. The centurion knows that he has authority from the Emperor in the jurisdiction that he has been assigned to.

When he commands his soldiers to come, they must come. When he commands them to go, they must go.

In his simple, yet profound faith in Christ's authority, he reasoned that it must be the same with Jesus.

He has jurisdiction over all things, including sickness and death.

In essence he is saying to Jesus, "If you tell sickness to go, then it must go and if you tell health to come, then it must come."

Amazing Right?

With that understanding the centurion simply acts on what he believes. Now this is where we often fall short. We believe great things about God, but we don't act on them. They are just empty words.

But these were no empty words for the centurion.

No need to come into my house Lord to heal my servant. No need to be in his presence or touch him like you did the leper. Your authority has no such limitations. Just say the word, and my servant will be healed.

Look if you want “name it and claim it,” here it is. Jesus alone has that power. He can speak and it is done. Period, end of story.

“Just say the word.” This was what caused Jesus to marvel. “Finally, someone who really gets it!”

Even the disciples didn’t understand his authority to this level yet. It wouldn’t be long before they would be in a boat on a raging sea and fearing for their lives. And Jesus would say to them, “O you of little faith. ***Do you not know that I have authority over the storm and that when I say go, it must go?”***”

But this guy really got it!

I wonder what God would do in and through us if we really got this?

How would Real Faith in Jesus’ Authority Change our Lives?

Four Things:

1. It Would Give Us Greater Freedom To Joyfully Serve God

You and I are God’s servants called to represent him in the jurisdictions he has put us in.

The centurion had been invested with authority and power to fulfill the role he had been given as a soldier. He was free to do this. He had permission from the emperor.

We too have been granted permission to serve Jesus in various ways.

Are you a Husband? You have been given freedom to lead your wife.

Are you a wife? You have been given freedom to submit to your husband.

Are you a child? You have been given freedom to joyfully honor your parents.

Are all of us salt and light in this world? Take up this calling willingly and joyfully. We have the truth and should be excited about proclaiming it. We are the preserving and flavor agents of the world. So, get to curing and seasoning!

Sometimes we are timid about taking up the calling that God has placed on our lives. But we have been called and empowered as his servants so take permission from him and act.

There is great joy and exhilaration in doing what we have been called to to. God is pleased when we joyfully serve him. It is not merely a duty, but a delight.

You are not longer a slave of sin, but of Christ. So, exercise your freedom in Him.

This is how Jesus served. He did not see serving his Father as drudgery, but delight. For the joy set before him, he endured the cross.

2. It Would Remind us that We Serve at God's Pleasure

There is also responsibility. That means that we must continually consult him in his word to make sure we are following his directions.

A centurion who went rogue would be punished severely.

Why? Because he failed to understand authority. It always comes back to authority. He must not ever think he has his own authority.

It is the same with us. Our authority is delegated to us by God and as we serve him we must remember that our entire aim is to honor our master not exalt ourselves.

This was the way Jesus saw it. He came to do the will of his Father, not his own.

3. It Would Remove our Fear of Man

Why?

Because there is a king on his throne who has all authority and power.

Therefore, we need not fear anything because we know he has our back and we are serving under his authority.

So much of what we do or don't do is motivated out of fear because we don't grasp the authority that God has.

The centurion could have feared the illness that was threatening to take his servants life, but instead he trusted in authority and power of God to heal him.

What would it be like if we didn't allow fear to influence our decisions?

Just think about it for a moment.

Do you fear what others think about you so you don't share your faith openly?

Do you fear losing the security you feel from your steady job so you hold on to it with a death grip and it keeps you from even considering the possibility that God may be calling you to serve him in another way?

Or perhaps he has you right where you are supposed to be, but you don't experience joy and peace in serving him because you're your trust in in your job rather than in him?

Do you fear your children are going to go astray and so you remain in a constant state of worry because you feel like there is nothing you can do about it?

Is Christ not Lord over our kids lives as well? Oh how we think so much of ourselves, as if we could keep them safe and secure and walking down the right path by our own powers.

How many of you had perfect upbringings? Perfect parents? Perfect educations? If we could take a quick survey we would see all the crud that we have come through.

How is it, moms and dads, that we are walking with the Lord today when we didn't come from the perfect families? When we were exposed to so much sin? How is it?

Do you think that there just might be a God in heaven who is bigger than all of it and who graciously works through our failures? A God who works all things for the good of his people who love him, but even before they loved him?

You know that I don't mean that we live fatalistically as if there is nothing that we can do. Far from it. We are responsible to Christ as we just talked about to follow his ways. But we must not fear.

Young people, do you worry about your future? Who will you marry? What kind of work will you do? What if you make a wrong decision? Will it wreck your life?

Well, again follow the Lord and his Word. Our decisions do have consequences. They do.

But seek him and follow his word and then do as you please. You see when you follow his word his pleasure becomes your pleasure and when you live your life it will be to please him.

God has your life in his hands and you can trust him without fear.

Illustration: Coronavirus

In God's providence, the coronavirus provides us with a wonderful illustration of what I am trying to get across this morning.

Here is this virus, which in the eyes of many, is wreaking havoc on the world. How bad it really is remains to be seen.

Nevertheless, people are scared and panicking. Events around the world are being cancelled. We can't go on vacation because of it. People are buying up supplies from store shelves fearful of not having what they need if they become sick and need to be quarantined.

Now, is there wisdom in taking precautions and being prepared? Of course, there is.

Should we be fearful as if there is some rogue power in the universe that God did not foresee and is not in control of?

No, there are no maverick molecules in the universe! A flea doesn't fall off a dog's back outside of the control of our heavenly Father.

Why are people afraid? Because they are not trusting in our God in heaven who has all authority and power.

But there is something really important about the truth that this coronavirus calls to our attention.

We are not in control of things. We are watching this virus spread and we have a profound sense of awareness that we are not in control.

We are getting a glimpse of the reality that if God ordains or allows a dangerous virus to go forth, this world could come to an end as we know it in a matter of months (Really Less!)

Brothers and sisters, seeing that is a really good thing! We trust too much in ourselves.

Be on the look out for opportunities to share the hope of Christ. Perhaps God is allowing this to open peoples' eyes to reality of sin, the frailty of life and their need for a Savior!

4. It Would Give us Peace in His Sovereign Plans

In other words, we can rest in God's sovereignty.

The centurion did not fear the illness, but instead trusted that Christ could heal it.

Now, I don't know this, but I suspect that this man would have also trusted Christ if he chose not to heal his servant.

You see when we trust in God's authority it enables us to receive whatever may come from the hand of God and rest in that.

Like Job we may say, "Shall we accept good things from the Lord and not suffering?"

So, what if I lose my job?

What if God doesn't heal?

What if my neighbor rejects the Gospel?

What if my kids go astray for a time or forever?

What if the coronavirus is worse than we think and many more people die?

Yeah, what if?

Faith in God's authority enables us to have peace even when God doesn't act in the way we think he should because we know that his will is perfect.

He must have better plan that includes you being sick, losing your job and your neighbor rejecting the gospel, your child going their own way.

You see faith in God includes not only faith in his authority, but also his wisdom and providence.

We may rest in calamity because we know the one who is above it all and he walks with us through it all.

Well, I have spent a long time talking about faith in God's Authority and that is what I want you to come away with this morning if you come away with anything.

That is what Jesus marveled at in the centurion.

But there is one more very important thing that we need to look at in this text.

Look at vv. 11-12

11 I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, 12 while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

Now that is an interesting thing to say at this point. Luke doesn't include this statement, but Matthew does.

Why?

Again, it has do with Matthew's concern to communicate something to a predominately Jewish audience. These two verses are written with them in mind.

So, Let me point out the Two Main things that I think Jesus is trying to do with these words:

First, He is Presenting God's Plan of Salvation for All the Nations

Second, He is Shattering the Jew's Myth of Security in Themselves

1. He is Presenting God's Plan of Salvation for All the Nations

“many will come from east and west”

This is a reference to the Gentile nations all over the world.

This plan was not new with Jesus, but one put in place long ago. It started in eternity with God's plan of salvation in election. Then we see it being worked out in time in history.

God chose the people of Israel not so that they could keep the good news to themselves, but so that they would be a light to the nations. But they repeatedly rejected God's Law and ultimately, they would, as a people, reject Jesus as the Messiah.

But this was not outside of the plan of God. Paul says in Romans 11:11 that, *"through their (the Jews) trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles..."*

That was God's plan all along, but we find that in his providence it comes about in a way that is unexpected, through the Jews disobedience.

So, Jesus is prophesying here of what God is going to do amongst the Gentiles. He is going to gather them into the Kingdom of heaven from all over the world.

This centurion is "Exhibit A" in God's plan for the nations. It is really interesting that while Matthew is the most Jewish of the Gospels, it is also drops in many references to God's plan among the Gentiles.

And one of the purposes here in presenting such a plan is that Matthew's Jewish readers (and us) will take up the call of Christ in the Great Commission to make disciples of all nations. His Jewish readers needed to catch God's vision that Jesus is the Messiah for the whole world and not just for the Jews.

Now notice the picture that we get of heaven here in this text.

The scene is a great banquet hall and a lavish feast of the who's who of Redemptive History.

Who is in attendance? The Big Three: Abraham, Isaac & Jacob.

And who is reclining at the feast with them? Not the Scribes and the Pharisees, but the likes of people like the Roman Centurion. What a vision this is.

Jews and Gentiles reclining together, eating the same food at the table of their One Master.

Oh, this was unfathomable to the Jews. Jesus was wrecking their whole wrong view of God's plan and his kingdom.

It was not just for them, but for all nations.

This is a glorious picture of the truth Paul proclaims in Galatians 3:28, "*There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*"

And

Ephesians 2 where he speaks of making Jews and Gentiles "one new man" in Christ.

What is the requirement for getting into this banquet in heaven?

It is faith alone in Christ alone. Not works.

This leads to the second thing that Jesus is trying to do and that is...

2. He is Shattering the Jew's Myth of Security in Themselves

He says that the "Sons of the Kingdom" will be cast out of the Banquet Hall.

First, of all, who are they? This is a reference to the people of Israel, the chosen nation of God.

Paul says of them in Romans 9:4-5

They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen.

They were given all the blessings of the kingdom of God, but many squandered them. They should have had great humility and thanksgiving at the Lord's wonderful grace toward them, but instead rejected God and took pride in His

grace as if it something earned. They exalted themselves in their own thinking and look down on every other nation.

They put their trust in their own ethnic and religious heritage and in their accomplishments. Paul, who had been a Pharisee, tells us the way he thought of himself.

Philippians 3:4b-6

4b If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: 5 circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; 6 as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

They had trusted in their own works and were sincerely secure in their salvation because of their high view of themselves. But they were sincerely wrong and their security was a myth.

Remember how John the Baptist had challenged their security of works in Matthew 3:9 saying,

And do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father,' for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham.

Jesus is doing the same thing here. He is shattering the myth of their security by telling them, "I am not the least impressed with you family line, your titles, degrees, your achievements or whatever."

He is saying that if you are trusting in anything besides me then you are destined for a place of outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. The Bible calls this place hell or the Lake of Fire.

It is the very opposite of the picture of heaven that we just considered.

In hell there are people, but utter loneliness.

In hell there is physical suffering that never ends.

There is thirst, but no water, hunger, but no food.

There is everlasting regret and frustration and nothing that can be done about it.

And whereas in this life we know that even the worst suffering will come to an end through death.

In hell the appetite of suffering is never satisfied by death.

What is our only hope of escaping such a punishment?

It is trusting in Christ alone, in what he has done to deliver you. He died on the cross to pay our penalty and rose again victorious over sin and death.

Our only source real security in salvation is resting in what Christ alone has done for us.

And beware of turning your faith in to work that you may boast in. Faith is merely an instrument by which we cling to Christ. Our faith is not the security, Christ is.

Trust in him alone and you will have assurance of your salvation.

Conclusion

Well, in conclusion let me read the last verse...

13 And to the centurion Jesus said, "Go; let it be done for you as you have believed." And the servant was healed at that very moment.

We have been talking about Jesus' authority to heal through this message, but here in the last verse we see the proof of it.

There was not even a moment of delay. When Jesus said "Be healed," the man was healed instantly. His authority is absolute, His Word Powerful!

He is worthy of our trust and obedience.

Let us follow the example of the Centurion's Faith in Christ's Authority and just see what God would do!

Amen?