



Matthew 8:5–13

5 When Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him, asking for help. 6 “Lord,” he said, “my servant lies at home paralyzed, suffering terribly.” 7 Jesus said to him, “Shall I come and heal him?” 8 The centurion replied, “Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed. 9 For I myself am a man under authority, with sol-

diers 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." 10 When Jesus heard this, he was amazed and said to those following him, "Truly I tell you, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith. 11 I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. 12 But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." 13 Then Jesus said to the centurion, "Go! Let it be done just as you believed it would." And his servant was healed at that moment.

Reflection

The crowds were amazed at Jesus after his Sermon on the Mount. In today's passage it is Jesus' turn to be amazed. Just stop for a moment and think about this – Jesus is amazed. The Lord of glory is amazed. The God of the universe is amazed. And who by? A zealous Pharisee and his passion for God's law? A teacher of the law and his wisdom in the Scriptures? No – not by a Jew at all, but a Roman centurion, a Gentile commander of Roman troops; Jesus is amazed by an oppressor of the Jewish nation. By his faith.

In our passage this Roman centurion comes to Jesus to ask for his help. Centurions were important Roman military

commanders; they don't usually ask, they demand. With 100 Roman soldiers at their beck and call, and the authority of the Caesar behind them, they don't ask, they tell and they get. But not this one, because he recognises authority when he sees it.

“Lord,” he said, “my servant lies at home paralyzed, suffering terribly.”

Just like the leper yesterday he addresses Jesus as ‘Lord.’ The two men couldn't be more different: the leper an outcast Jew, living in extreme poverty and shame, living under the shadow of death, suffering from an awful disease; and a Gentile commander of armies, wealthy, respected in society and in charge, a leader of men. The two couldn't be from more different walks of life and yet they have these things in

common: both recognise authority when they see it, both are in desperate need, both address Jesus as Lord, and both are loved by him because of their faith. Jesus doesn't discriminate, he accepts all who come to him by faith.

The Roman centurion's desperate need is not his own. He's an upright man. His concern is for his servant who is suffering terribly, in the original Greek the words used are 'who is being dreadfully tortured' by his illness. Notice how he doesn't order, he asks; and not for himself, but for one of the lowliest members of his household; he didn't send someone on his behalf, he came himself; and he addresses Jesus as Lord. And when Jesus offers to help, this humble commander is taken aback. Just like John the Baptist, he says he is not

worthy. Humility in great ones is so attractive isn't it? You can hear his humility in his words.

‘Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof.’

‘Lord, I am not worthy for you to enter my house.’ Perhaps he's a convert to Judaism and knows that Jews don't associate with Gentiles. One of the many things that they'd added to Scripture was that to enter a Gentile's house would make you ceremonially unclean. Perhaps it's this. Or perhaps this centurion simply sees Jesus for who he truly is. Wait for his extraordinary statement; words that almost leave the author of life speechless, words that amaze Jesus himself:

‘... just say the word, and my servant will be healed.’

You see this Roman centurion knows all about authority and power. His life is built around authority and power and he knows it when he sees it. Hear his reasoning in verse 9:

9 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.”

This Roman centurion knows how authority works. He has many under his authority and he too sits under authority to Caesar. And so he recognises the authority in

Jesus's words and his actions and more than that he can see that Jesus' authority comes directly from his Father, from God himself. 'I'm not worthy Jesus, and I wouldn't waste your time, when you can just speak and it will be.' What an extraordinary statement of faith!

And so Jesus speaks and it comes to be. "Go! Let it be done just as you believed it would." And his servant was healed in that moment, from a distance, at a word from Jesus – but not before Jesus expresses his amazement at the faith of this man. And this man's commendation comes at the condemnation of the Jewish nation. You see he's a Gentile, a convert from another culture. The promises, the prophecies, the great history of God's people – these aren't his – he's a newcomer, an

outsider. Jewish people won't even enter his house or share a meal with him; and yet he's demonstrated a faith the likes of which Jesus has found nowhere amongst the people of God. In Matthew 8 the leper and the Gentile stand tall in their faith recognising Jesus as Lord and coming to him in desperate need; while God's chosen people reject Jesus, blinded by their self-righteous hypocrisy and their misunderstanding of the very word of God that says the Messiah will do these very things: heal the sick and call the Gentiles into his kingdom.

Jesus commends and condemns in these words:

“Truly I tell you, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith.

11 I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. 12 But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

His gospel is a gospel to the nations; his kingdom is open to all who respond with genuine repentance and faith. From the east to the west to the ends of the earth God’s people will come to the places that have been reserved for them at the heavenly feast. But God’s people are not exclusively from the Jewish nation, in fact only a remnant of them will be saved; God’s people come from all walks of life, from

every tribe and nation on earth, their seat guaranteed not by their ethnicity but by their faith in Jesus' name.

Think

Take a moment now to consider the faith of the centurion. Do you recognise the authority of Jesus like he does? Consider his standing in life and his humility. Consider his faith in the power of Jesus. In contrast to his faith, is your God too small? Are your prayers too small? The centurion barely knew Jesus, consider how we know him through the Scriptures and through his Holy Spirit who lives in our hearts. How much more should we trust him wholeheartedly? How much more should we be examples of faith to those around us? How much more should we urgently seek him

out and lay all our worries and cares and anxieties at his feet?

Pray

Then pray for a faith that would bring great honour to Jesus. Pray for a faith that would amaze Jesus and astound those around you. Pray that people would sit up and take notice of your faith, that someone in your position could be so utterly humble and dependant and grateful to Jesus. And pray that your faith might draw others to Jesus and bring great glory to him in the process.