

## Sermon Topic: - Go Thy Way: The Centurion's Faith

Background: Jesus recently had preached the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7), then healed the leper (Matt 8:1-4). He then was approached by a Roman centurion (leader of 100 men) who asked for help. What would Jesus do or say in this situation?

The text is Matthew 8:5-13: "And when Jesus was entered into Capernaum, there came unto him a centurion, beseeching him, And saying, Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented. And Jesus saith unto him, I will come and heal him. The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed. For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say to this [man], Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth [it]. When Jesus heard [it], he marvelled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. 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. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. 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" (KJV).

Introduction: Centurions were commanders of 100 Roman soldiers. These men were assigned to various parts of the Roman Empire for various duties, including peacekeeping. Certainly some of these men were employed in the execution of people condemned to death for any number of misdeeds and crimes, of which Jesus Christ had been accused.

This centurion had a problem. One of his servants (we're not told how many he might have had) was suffering, "sick of the palsy." Strong's Concordance indicates the phrase as paralytikos, which is the Greek word from which we get paralytic; there was little if any hope that this servant would be well again.

### I. The Centurion Made an Appeal

We're not told which mountain was where Jesus preached the Sermon on the Mount. It could have been one around Capernaum, which itself was near the Sea of Galilee. After all, this is where Jesus was going. Regardless, when He arrived in Capernaum, He met a centurion who made a personal appeal to Jesus.

This centurion first made a respectful greeting. He had the authority to demand to see Jesus (or anyone else for that matter) and could have said something such as, "Hey, you, Teacher, heal my servant, and I mean right now!" He could have employed threats, imprisonment or any weapon in his arsenal. He could have done it without any fear of reprisal. The Romans were the masters, politically speaking, and all others were under their rule. Roman citizens had special privileges and protections. The centurion could have issued an order for Jesus to appear. In person. Right here. Right now.

Yet he didn't do that. He approached Jesus with respect, giving Him a great deal of dignity in the process. Notice he called Jesus Lord or Sir, from the Greek word kurios (according to Strong's Concordance). This is more remarkable, as the centurion didn't have to give any kind of respectful

greeting to anyone except perhaps his superiors. This is all the more remarkable given that Jesus was a Jew, and the Romans had no obligation to pay any kind of respect to their subjects.

Further, he didn't make a direct appeal for healing. He simply reported the servant's condition: "My servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented."

Did he have faith? How did he come to understand Jesus could heal someone as sick as his servant? Where did he come to learn anything at all about Jesus?

Jesus replied, "I'll come and heal him."

## II. Jesus Gave Him an Answer

"I will come and heal him." These six words were some of the most profound ever spoken. Why was this remarkable?

For one thing, Jews were forbidden to enter the houses of anyone who was not Jewish. Simon Peter ran into that problem a few years later after he went to the house of Cornelius, after he reported that Cornelius and his household became believers in Jesus! Did I mention Cornelius was a Roman centurion, also? This story is told in Acts 10. So we can see Jesus was willing to break tradition and visit the home of a Gentile to perform an act of mercy.

Second, Jesus could have healed the centurion's servant from a distance away. He did so for the son of a nobleman of Capernaum (see John 4), as well as for the daughter of the Syrophenician woman (see Mark 7). It is never explained why Jesus was willing to heal this servant in person, and there is no need to speculate or guess. We can be grateful He was willing to show this kindness and personal touch in this moment of need.

Third, and this is a bit ominous, this could have been one of the last miracles Capernaum ever saw. Just a few chapters later (Matt 11:23), Jesus condemned Capernaum because the people didn't repent when Jesus preached. Incredible as it sounds, Capernaum was the sight of several miracles, and some of Jesus' own preaching and teaching, yet the people didn't repent. They didn't accept God's message, so they endured God's judgment. Was this healing of the centurion's servant one of the mighty works Jesus spoke of in Matthew 11?

Finally, this willingness to go to the centurion's home shows just how much Jesus loved all people. It's no secret the Jews hated the Romans (why else would there have been the Zealots and other revolutionary groups, plus Judas and Theudas, mentioned by Gamaliel in Acts 5?), but Jesus put a stop to (at least some of) this thinking. If He, as the promised and expected King, was willing to love the enemies of His subjects, wouldn't and shouldn't they do the same thing?

## III. Note the Centurion's Reply

Imagine the centurion's reaction to the words of Jesus in the previous verse! He had made a polite request or inquiry, not asking Jesus specifically for his servant to be healed. In response, Jesus broke at least two of the greatest social taboos of that time and went to a Gentile home to heal a servant. We could guess the centurion was flabbergasted.

In so many words, he said to Jesus, "You don't have to do all that! I'm not worthy to have a visit from You. Just say the word, and my servant will be healed!" He further showed his understanding of who Jesus was by saying, "I have authority and tell a soldier to go, and he does; I tell another to come, and he does; and I tell my servant to do something, and he does it." Many of us who have served in the military are quite aware of the chain of command in that everyone has a superior and subordinates. This centurion had 100 soldiers under his supervision, but he also reported to higher ranking officers (for example, chiliarchs, commanders of 1,000 men; sometimes called chief captains in Acts, e.g. Claudius Lysias). He recognized something in Jesus that many of the Jewish people never comprehended.

If the centurion had anything else to say, we're not privy to the conversation. We can see that his words had an effect on Jesus unlike many others.

#### IV. Jesus Was Amazed

This is one of the few times in Scripture when Jesus was amazed or marveled at something. This recognition of faith that Jesus could heal the centurion's servant—from a distance—and the parallel of authority (coming from a Gentile!) must have been amazing indeed for Jesus. One thing that we sometimes forget is Christ's absolute humanity, and the ability to love, show anger, experience hunger and thirst, and to be amazed or to marvel at certain things.

Jesus expressed something that may be easily missed. He mentioned He hadn't seen such great faith in all of Israel. This is so true in that the centurion didn't specifically ask for healing or for any other thing. Most, if not all, the other miracles in which people came to Jesus were based on someone making a request. Examples include the son of the Capernaum noble, the Syrophenician woman, the catch of fish in Luke 5, the miraculous feeding of two different multitudes of people, and the healing of Lazarus in John 11. This man, let it be repeated, made no demand of Jesus. All he did was express a concern. Did he trust Jesus to do what was best? We may never know the extent of his faith, but we will have the record that Jesus provided healing and was amazed by this Gentile's faith!

#### V. Jesus Gave Additional Information

One thing to remember, especially in the Old Testament and gospels, is there was a distinction between the Jewish people, God's chosen people, and the rest of the human race. Gentiles were not part of God's dealings with Israel in regard to the Law of Moses and the promises of Israel's future. Some Gentiles did become believers (e.g., Rahab, the former harlot; Ruth of Moab). The Book of Esther tells how many people in the Medo-Persian Empire became Jews (see Esther 8). Later, Nicolas of Antioch, a Gentile proselyte or convert to Judaism, was one of the first seven deacons in the early church.

Following this declaration (v. 10) that Jesus hadn't seen such faith in all Israel, He went on to startle the listeners. Isaiah and other prophets gave glowing promises of the glory to come in Messiah's kingdom but didn't say very much about the role of the Gentiles in that kingdom. Jesus told the listeners that many would come from the east and west and sit down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. To the east were mountains and the land of Moab, Ammon and Syria; farther away were Babylon, Assyria and other locations. We can read in 2 Kings 17 that the king of Assyria carried many captives from the 10 Northern tribes to these and other locations. To the west

was the land of the Philistines and the Mediterranean Sea. The Jews of Jesus' day also knew about Cyprus, Crete and other territory along the sea. Surely they knew of the Romans coming from the west, as they conquered the land of Israel and was governing that land under their own laws.

However, for these people to have fellowship with the founders of the faith was something they weren't expecting! Even more, I doubt they expected to hear these words of warning, as spoken by Jesus that the children of the kingdom would be cast into outer darkness and experience weeping and gnashing of teeth. Did anyone ask Jesus for any additional information or to have Him explain this? Certainly they would lose God's blessings if they didn't repent and believe the gospel.

## VI. Conclusion

We have seen how the centurion, a Gentile, a member of the ruling powers, came to Jesus but didn't make any demands, requests or anything else. He simply said, "My servant is grievously tormented, sick of the palsy." Actually, this isn't so much an appeal as a statement, but there's an undercurrent of hope for healing.

Jesus didn't turn the man away, but offered to follow him home and heal the servant personally. Though this violated social taboos, Jesus was and is Lord and had the authority to go anywhere His presence was requested.

The centurion recognized authority. This amazed Jesus and led Him to declare that many (Gentiles) would sit with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. He also warned that the children of the kingdom would be cast into outer darkness, where there would be weeping and gnashing of teeth. What a solemn warning for us all.

Jesus told the centurion, "Go thy way, as you have believed, so it has been done." This may seem to be anticlimax or less important part of the story, but this is the most important part. Matthew recorded that the servant was healed in the very same hour! This is proof positive that Jesus met the servant's needs and honored the centurion's faith. The centurion came in faith. Jesus honored that faith, and the centurion went his way, receiving the promise. May we have the same kind of faith he had!

**By Jonathan Spurlock**