

The Believing Centurion, a Gentile Whose Faith Jesus Commended

Lesson Scripture: Matthew 8:5-13

Focus Scripture: Matthew 8:5-13

Key Verse: When Jesus heard him (the centurion), he was amazed and said to those who followed him, "Truly I tell you, in no one in Israel have I found such faith." Matthew 8:10

MATTHEW 8:5-13 (NRSV UE)

5 When he entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him, appealing to him

6 and saying, "Lord, my servant is lying at home paralyzed, in terrible distress."

7 And he said to him, "I will come and cure him."

8 The centurion answered, "Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof, but only speak the word, and my servant will be healed.

9 For I also 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 slave, 'Do this,' and the slave does it."

10 When Jesus heard him, he was amazed and said to those who followed him, "Truly I tell you, in no one in Israel have I found such faith.

11 I tell you, many will come from east and west and will take their places at the banquet with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven,

12 while the heirs of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

13 And Jesus said to the centurion, "Go; let it be done for you according to your faith." And the servant was healed in that hour.

MATTHEW 8:5-13 (KJV)

5 And when Jesus was entered into Capernaum, there came unto him a centurion, beseeching him,

6 And saying, Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented.

7 And Jesus saith unto him, I will come and heal him.

8 The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed.

9 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.

10 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.

11 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.

13 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.

Key Terms

- **Tension** – In scripture, it means statements/details seen as true, but which do not sit comfortably together.
- **Harmonizing** – Making things that seem conflicting agree.
- **Omniscient** – The trait we attribute to God of knowing all things at all times.

Introduction

One term we use to describe God is omniscient: The Lord is fully aware of everything at all times. Therefore, we cannot surprise him since he knows our thoughts before we voice them.

But can we impress him? Can we make God say, “Whoa! Great job! I am impressed!” This lesson looks at someone who did that. His approach to Jesus was so stunning that Jesus said, “This is what I am looking for in people: free-flowing, unrestricted faith.” Search for what drew this commendation from Jesus. But don’t stop there.

Consider that since this guy could impress

God, you can impress the Lord also. And note that no elaborate rites, rituals, or rigid structures were employed. Even more amazingly, the guy was not asking for a favor for himself. He asked for another person – an intercessory request. Add to that the scriptures give no account of him being a regular worshiper, or even a member of God’s special people – Israel. All of these elements blended

should excite our hope of pleasing God and receiving answers to our prayer requests.

Telling the Bible Story

The event of this lesson is reported in three Gospels with three different emphases and details (Matthew 8:5-13, Luke 7:1-10, and John 4:46-

54). After reading the three reports, one must ask these questions: who was healed (son or servant), and in what way the request was made (in person or proxy)? This is a tension that no one has been able to resolve over the centuries to everyone’s satisfaction. So, we advise, stick to the fundamentals. Jesus received

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a request from a known person (an official) to heal a sick dependent, and the person making the request exercised faith, which facilitated the miraculous healing with Jesus' admiration.

Some commentators take the easy route by harmonizing Mathew and Luke, treating John's account as a similar but parallel account. Unless you have some special insight, we must live with that tension.

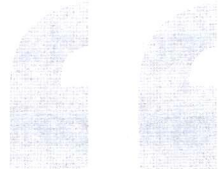
The centurion's reasoning is amazingly straightforward. It is not based on deep religious secrets or mystical revelation. He understood the dynamics of authority. And if Jesus was who he was represented to be, he must have the authority to

command healing over sickness. Simple, straightforward, and powerful.

Often, we read Jesus' amazement here with casual eyes as if it were no big thing. No! This display of faith had to be huge. Only twice in all his ministry did Jesus show such admiration (Matt. 8:10 and Mark 6:6). Impressing Jesus can be no

simple matter.

A person who is just looking for shouting moments in scripture must side-step verses 11-12. They give a very acid warning. The religious elite will miss the kingdom of God, while seemingly unworthy people will make the glory train. Whoa! Salvation is not in obedience to rituals but in humility and obedience to God.



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At times, we demand so much of people before we can seat them in our religious communities. By contrast, a man who considered himself unworthy to accommodate Jesus approached the Lord just as he was and received what he asked for. Is there a lesson there? You decide.

Sankofa

Considered himself unworthy yet turned to God for mercy and favor: many have walked that road, including the famous John Newton (1725 – 1807), credited for the hymn "Amazing Grace." Many in public spaces make that claim of

unworthiness as a preface to telling us about their accomplishments. But often the claimed humility is strangled in the brightness with which the successes are presented. But still, it is indeed a humbling experience to witness a person who truly feels unworthy yet approaches God with a request.

Before, in my carnal mind, John Newton would have a minus-50 chance of getting favor. But to the God addressed in Psalm 51:17, he was still acceptable and worthy of God's grace. That is something to reflect on in our private devotions.

Case Study

The centurion's claim of unworthiness nudges us to consider if we ourselves are worthy to receive from God. Are we, with all our rites and rituals, still understanding what it takes to be humble before God with a faith that impresses Jesus?

A doctoral study that considered this issue is "Identifying the Core Components of Christian Humility" –

Martin Bernard Timothy, 2020. The study is available online. Here a few of the major core components it identified: a dependence on God, being a servant, freedom from selfish ambitions, and valuing/appreciating others. At this point, we apologize if you were expecting something more mystical. The centurion had it right. The key is approaching God

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sincerely, believing that God is who he said he is, exercising the power he says he has, and can address those things that concern us. It is not about rites, rituals, or structures. It is standing before God in the attitude that says, "God, despite my failing, you know me and what is best for me. Therefore, I am

opening up all of me to all of you so you can grant to me what you decide is right for me now and in eternity." Oh yes! Just like the centurion, we, too, can impress the Lord.

Life Application

In our ministry language today, the centurion was an intercessor. He brought

the needs of another before God. Notice how plain and straightforward he was and the faith that backed his request.

With this in mind, consider how you will intercede for others before God. Are you confident in making your requests? Do you feel you are qualified to petition God on behalf of others? With all the craziness going on in our communities, churches, and the world in general, adopt certain persons, people groups, or a cause to intercede for. Adopt these people or causes as your spiritual children and lift them up in prayer until you see GOD'S answer to the concerns you pray about.

Questions

1. How does music contribute to

corporate praise and worship?

2. What should we listen for when we sing hymns of praise?
3. What are the benefits of reminding ourselves of God's goodness in past years?

Closing Devotions

Closing Hymn: "My Faith Looks Up to Thee" (AMECH #415)

Closing Prayer: Dear Father, remind me of the simplicity of approaching you with my concerns. And guide me to identify those persons or causes I should adopt and intercede for. In Jesus' name. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

July 6-12

Monday	Acts 2:14-21 (Filled With the Spirit's Boldness)
Tuesday	Psalm 34:1-9 (God Delivers From All Fear)
Wednesday	Psalm 34:10-22 (God Is Near the Brokenhearted)
Thursday	Mark 8:27-33 (Imperfect Understanding)
Friday	Isaiah 41:8-13 (Fear Not; God Is With You)
Saturday	Mark 14:55-72 (Crumbling Under Pressure)
Sunday	John 21:15-19 (Called to Feed Christ's Flock)