

Bible Stories for Adults

Jesus Heals a Centurion's Servant

Matthew 8:1-13

Opening

Gathering: What are signs of great faith?

Today's Focus: Jesus healed the servant of a Roman centurion who demonstrated great faith.

Key Verses: *Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.*
Hebrews 11:1

When Jesus heard this, He was astonished and said ... "I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith. ... It will be done just as you believed it would."
Matthew 8:10, 13

Opening Prayer

Lesson

The City (*Luke 7:1*)

Where does today's story take place?
Luke 7:1

What things had He been saying?
Matthew 5:1-2

What happened to Jesus before He reached Capernaum?
Matthew 8:1-4

Where was Jesus likely going in Capernaum?
Mark 1:21, 29

Were any of Jesus' other apostles from Capernaum?
Mark 2:1, 14

The Centurion (*Matthew 8:5*)

Besides the large crowds, who sought Jesus for help when He came to Capernaum?
Matthew 8:1, 5

The nearest legion of Roman troops was stationed in Syria
Legions had 6000 men divided into 60 centuries, each up to 100 men (typically 60-80)
Centuries were also stationed at key spots - Caesarea (on coast), Jerusalem
Capernaum was a customs post and had a century

Centuries were led by centurions - long-service, regular soldiers responsible for discipline
Intelligent, well-paid, highly motivated, could be relocated frequently
Roman soldiers, including centurions, were not allowed to marry or have a family

This centurion was highest Roman official in Capernaum, he spoke with the emperor's authority
Every centurion in the New Testament is mentioned with honor

What are some other centurions mentioned in the Bible?

Mark 15:39
Acts 10:1-2, 22, 44-48
Acts 22:24-26
Acts 23:12, 17-18
Acts 23:23-24; 24:23
Acts 27:1, 30-32, 41-43

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The Servant (*Matthew 8:6*)

What kind of help did the centurion want from Jesus?

Matthew 8:6

In the Roman Empire, slaves did not matter and had no rights

Aristotle: *There can be no friendship nor justice towards inanimate things; not even towards a horse or an ox, nor a slave. A slave is a living tool, just as a tool is an inanimate slave.*

Gaius: *The master possesses the power of life and death over the slave.*

Varro: *Three classes of agricultural instruments - the articulate comprising the slaves, the inarticulate comprising the cattle, and the mute comprising the vehicles.*

Cato: *Advise to buyers of farms - Look over the livestock and hold a sale. Sell worn-out oxen, blemished cattle, ...an old slave, a sickly slave, and whatever else is superfluous.*

Chrysologus: *Whatever a master does to a slave, undeservedly, in anger, willingly, unwillingly, in forgetfulness, after careful thought, knowingly, unknowingly, is judgment, justice, law.*

Was the centurion just concerned that he couldn't get any work out of this servant?

Luke 7:2

Such a useless slave would have normally been cast out

This is the only time Jesus was asked to help someone's servant

The Request (*Luke 7:3*)

How does Luke's account seem to contradict Matthew's account on first glance?

Luke 7:3

Proxy example - When the President speaks to Congress, he doesn't have to be there

Where do we see another example of such a proxy reference?

Matthew 27:26

Did the centurion send representatives because he was too busy or important?

John 4:9

The centurion was probably not from Samaria. Why would this verse apply to him?

Acts 10:27-28

How did the early Christians respond to Peter bringing the gospel to Cornelius' family?

Acts 11:1-3

What important revelation came to the Christians through the conversion of Cornelius' family?

Acts 11:18

The Reason (*Luke 7:4-5*)

Why would the Jewish leaders in Capernaum go out of their way for this Gentile centurion?

Luke 7:4-5

Romans called the Jews a filthy race with barbarous superstitions

Rumored that Jews worshipped a donkey's head & annually sacrificed a gentile stranger

Non-Jews who feared God & gave a lot to the Jewish community were rare & respected

For a centurion to have built the synagogue meant a great financial sacrifice

Did the centurion deserve Jesus' help because of these righteous acts?

Galatians 1:10

What had Jesus said earlier that day on the Mount about rewards for acts of righteousness?

Matthew 6:1-2, 5, 16

What concerned Jesus about the centurion's worthiness to receive His help?

Matthew 23:25-28

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The Prerequisite (*Matthew 8:7*)

- What had to be present for Jesus to agree to perform a miracle of healing?
Mark 6:5-6
- How could Jesus decide whether to heal the servant without the centurion to show his faith?
Matthew 8:7
- Did Jesus have to go to the centurion to know whether he had faith in his heart?
Luke 16:15
- Then why did He want to see the centurion's faith?
Luke 8:43-48

The Attitude (*Luke 7:6-7*)

- Did Jesus get the proof of faith He wanted when he saw the centurion?
Luke 7:6-7
- Why would this response have been totally unexpected?
Mark 10:42-44
- What other story of a Gentile seeking Jesus' help shows why the centurion might feel unworthy?
Matthew 15:22-28
Mishnah: *The dwelling places of Gentiles are unclean*
- What lesson did Jesus teach that the centurion was exhibiting?
Matthew 23:11-12

The Proof (*Matthew 8:8-9*)

- Besides having an attitude of humility, how did the centurion show his faith in Jesus?
Matthew 8:8
- Why did he think Jesus could heal his servant from a distance just by saying the word?
Matthew 8:9
- What kind of authority did Jesus have that the centurion realized?
Matthew 28:18
- How had the centurion come to understand Jesus' authority?
John 14:9-11
- What had happened months earlier in the same town that the centurion might have remembered?
John 4:46-53

The Faith (*Matthew 8:10*)

- How did Jesus respond to the message from the centurion?
Matthew 8:10
- Did Jesus ever meet anyone else who He commended for having Great Faith?
Matthew 15:28
- What is faith?
Hebrews 11:1

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The Lesson (*Matthew 8:11-12*)

Besides the example of faith, what did Jesus want to make sure the crowd recognized?

Matthew 8:11

Was this a new concept to the Jews?

Isaiah 25:6 (56:3-8)

Did Jesus just want to prepare the Jews that they would see faithful Gentiles in heaven?

Matthew 8:12

What parable did Jesus later tell to make this point even clearer?

Matthew 22:8-9 (2-14)

Was this lesson just for the Jews or is there a lesson for us also?

Romans 11:17-21

Matthew Henry: *Men will then be judged, not by what they were called, but by what they were.*

So besides calling ourselves Christians, we are also to worship every week?

Romans 12:1

The Result (*Matthew 8:13*)

Did Jesus say the Word as requested by the centurion?

Matthew 8:13

How was Jesus pointing to something He had said earlier that day?

Matthew 7:7-8

How did Luke describe the result?

Luke 7:10

Closing Prayer

Response - Consider and meditate on one each day this week

1. What kind of reputation do I have among my family? ... among my friends? ... among my coworkers? ... among my neighbors?
(*Luke 7:4-5; 2 Chronicles 9:5-8; Job 1:8; Proverbs 22:1; Acts 5:13; 1 Timothy 3:2-13*)
2. Am I usually more concerned about impressing others or pleasing God?
(*Luke 7:4-5; Matthew 6:1-6; 23:25-28; Romans 2:29; 1 Corinthians 4:1-5; 2 Corinthians 10:12-18; Galatians 1:10; 1 Thessalonians 2:3-6; 1 Peter 3:3-4*)
3. Do I recognize the authority of Jesus in my life?
(*Luke 7:6-7; 10:22; Psalm 8; Daniel 7:13-14; Matthew 28:18; John 3:31-35; 17:2; Ephesians 1:19-23; Philippians 2:9-11*)
4. How do I handle the authority God has given me?
(*Luke 7:8; 9:1, 52-55; Genesis 1:26-28; Daniel 2:36-38; 4:17; Mark 10:42-45; John 19:10-11; 2 Corinthians 13:10*)
5. How do others see evidence of my faith?
(*Luke 7:6-9; Matthew 5:13-16; 7:16-20; Galatians 5:16-25; James 2:14-26*)