

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 = Capernaum, Fishing town on NW shore of Sea of Galilee

What things had He been saying?

Matthew 5:1-2 = The Sermon on the Mount (see lessons from last two weeks)

What happened to Jesus before He reached Capernaum?

Matthew 8:1-4 = He healed a leper who believed Jesus could heal him

Where was Jesus likely going in Capernaum?

Mark 1:21, 29 = To Peter and Andrew's house

Were any of Jesus' other apostles from Capernaum? = Possibly also James & John (P&As partners)

Mark 2:1, 14 = Matthew (Levi) collected taxes in Capernaum

The Centurion (*Matthew 8:5*)

Besides the large crowds, who sought Jesus for help when He came to Capernaum?

Matthew 8:1, 5 = A centurion

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 = Jerusalem, Saw Jesus die & said, *Surely this man was the Son of God!*

Acts 10:1-2, 22, 44-48 = Caesarea, Peter brought gospel to Cornelius & Gentiles

Acts 22:24-26 = Jerusalem, Stopped flogging of Paul & reported Paul's citizenship

Acts 23:12, 17-18 = Jerusalem, Took Paul's nephew to commander to warn of plot

Acts 23:23-24; 24:23 = Two took Paul from Jerusalem to Caesarea, One guarded Paul

Acts 27:1, 30-32, 41-43 = Caesarea, Took Paul to Rome, protected Paul after wreck

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The Servant (*Matthew 8:6*)

What kind of help did the centurion want from Jesus? = This palsy was untreatable by doctors
Matthew 8:6 = Healing for his servant who was *paralyzed and in terrible suffering*
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 = No, he valued him highly, concerned he could die, may be his only *family*
Such a useless slave would have normally been cast out

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

The Request (*Luke 7:3*)

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

Luke 7:3 = The centurion didn't come to Jesus, he sent Jewish leaders

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 = Literally says *he flogged Jesus* – Clear that Pilate himself didn't

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

John 4:9 = Jews were not to associate with Samaritans, centurion sent Jewish leaders

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

Acts 10:27-28 = *It is against our law for a Jew to associate with a Gentile or visit him*

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

Acts 11:1-3 = They were upset that he associated and visited unclean Gentiles

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

Acts 11:18 = They realized that Jesus came to save both Jew and Gentile

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 = They said he deserved it, he loved the Jews and built their synagogue

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 = Winning the approval of men does not make one deserved before God

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

Matthew 6:1-2, 5, 16 = Praise from men is the only reward when trying to please men

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

Matthew 23:25-28 = The level of righteousness he had on the inside

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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 = Faith

How could Jesus decide whether to heal the servant without the centurion to show his faith?

Matthew 8:7 = Jesus decided to go see him

Did Jesus have to go to the centurion to know whether he had faith in his heart?

Luke 16:15 = You *justify yourselves in the eyes of men, but God knows your hearts*

Then why did He want to see the centurion's faith?

Luke 8:43-48 = He wanted the centurion and the others to see it and grow from it

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

Did Jesus get the proof of faith He wanted when he saw the centurion?

Luke 7:6-7 = Yes and no; He got proof, but without ever seeing the centurion

Why would this response have been totally unexpected? = Centurion had authority

Mark 10:42-44 = *Rulers of Gentiles lord it over them & their high officials exercise authority*

What other story of a Gentile seeking Jesus' help shows why the centurion might feel unworthy?

Matthew 15:22-28 = The Canaanite woman near Tyre - *I was sent only to...Israel*

Mishnah: *The dwelling places of Gentiles are unclean*

What lesson did Jesus teach that the centurion was exhibiting?

Matthew 23:11-12 = *Whoever humbles himself will be exalted*

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

Besides having an attitude of humility, how did the centurion show his faith in Jesus?

Matthew 8:8 = *But just say the word, and my servant will be healed*

Why did he think Jesus could heal his servant from a distance just by saying the word?

Matthew 8:9 = He understood Jesus had God's authority; he had Caesar's authority

What kind of authority did Jesus have that the centurion realized?

Matthew 28:18 = *All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me*

How had the centurion come to understand Jesus' authority?

John 14:9-11 = He had seen the Father working in the Son

What had happened months earlier in the same town that the centurion might have remembered?

John 4:46-53 = Jesus healed Jewish leader's son in Capernaum remotely from Cana

The Faith (*Matthew 8:10*)

How did Jesus respond to the message from the centurion?

Matthew 8:10 = *I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith*

Did Jesus ever meet anyone else who He commended for having Great Faith?

Matthew 15:28 = Only one other, the Canaanite woman whose daughter He healed

What is faith?

Hebrews 11:1 = *Being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.*

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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 = Gentiles world-wide would join the righteous Jews at heaven's feast
Was this a new concept to the Jews?
Isaiah 25:6 (56:3-8) = No, the prophets had foretold it, but they ignored & forgot it
Did Jesus just want to prepare the Jews that they would see faithful Gentiles in heaven?
Matthew 8:12 = No, He wanted them to know they wouldn't get in just by being Jews
What parable did Jesus later tell to make this point even clearer?
Matthew 22:8-9 (2-14) = Wedding Feast, *Those I invited did not deserve to come*
Was this lesson just for the Jews or is there a lesson for us also?
Romans 11:17-21 = *If God did not spare the natural branches, He will not spare you*
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 = *Offer your bodies as living sacrifices - be full and complete Christians*

The Result (*Matthew 8:13*)

Did Jesus say the Word as requested by the centurion?
Matthew 8:13 = Yes - *Go! It will be done just as you believed it would.*
How was Jesus pointing to something He had said earlier that day?
Matthew 7:7-8 = *Ask and it will be given to you ...*
How did Luke describe the result?
Luke 7:10 = *The men who had been sent returned and found the servant well*

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*)