

The Marvelous Faith Of The Centurion Pleasant Plains 2-24-2019AM NICK ANGEL

- ***READ John 4:19-24*** It doesn't take much reading of the New Testament to come to the realization that there was much racial tension that was present within the first century. Whereas we often differentiate races during our day based upon the color of our skin, the people of the first century only made one major distinction and that distinction was based upon whether or not one was a Jew or a Gentile. It was made depending on whether or not one was a member of God's chosen nation of Israel the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob or whether they were of some other lineage.
- This distinction was one that was often at the forefront of the minds of people as they interacted with others, and we even see this within the text that we just read together. In **John 4**, we find Jesus going to ask a Samaritan woman for some water. During their day, this would have been a highly culturally unacceptable thing to do. The woman seems to have even been taken aback by what Jesus is doing and she remarks, *"How is it that You, being a Jew, ask me for a drink since I am a Samaritan woman?" (For Jews have no dealing with Samaritans.)* (**John 4:9**) However, this isn't the last time we see the racial differences being brought up. In **John 4:19-24**, we see the woman making distinctions between the religious practices of her people and the people of Jesus. *"Our fathers worshiped in this mountain, and you people say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship."* (**John 4:20**) Surely we can feel the resentment of sorts coming off of her lips as she said these words, and this attitude wasn't peculiar to just this woman. It was quite common among those who lived during this time. It was a cultural norm.
- However, we need to recognize that not all people had such an attitude during Jesus's day. There was at least one man who seemed to be willing to break at least a couple of strongly held cultural norms. In fact, the centurion that we are about to read about in **Matthew 8:5-12 & Luke 7:1-10** seems to care very little for the cultural norms of his day. In this text, we are introduced to this nameless centurion, his time of great distress, and what he saw as the solution to his problem. The willingness to act that we see in this centurion revolves around the marvelous faith that he possessed, and after we look at the story, we will finish up our study by looking at what made his faith so marvelous.

I. The Story

A. A centurion is highly concerned over a sick servant. (**Matthew 8:5,6 & Luke 7:1,2**)

1. In Matthew's account of this story, we are simply told that this man who comes to Jesus was a centurion. During the rule of the Romans, a centurion would have been a military officer in command of a group of soldiers called a "century." These centuries would range anywhere from a hundred soldiers to several hundred soldiers. There would be multiple centuries in a cohort and multiple cohorts in a single legion that usually consisted of about 5,000 men. All of this simply goes to show that this man was not someone who was of no repute. To be a centurion came with at least some sort of authority and power.
2. We read of multiple centurions within the New Testament. It was a centurion who stood guard over Jesus at the foot of the cross who said following Jesus's death, the earthquake, and other events, *"Truly this was the Son of God!"* (**Matthew 27:54**) Then possibly and even probably the most famous centurion in the New Testament would be Cornelius who is introduced in **Acts 10** as the first Gentile to be presented with the Gospel. There are not an overabundance of centurions in the New Testament, but each one mentioned plays a significant role, and that is no different for this centurion that is found in **Matthew 8 & Luke 7**.
3. One of the most significant things that we are told about this centurion is that he cared deeply for his servant who had become sick. Luke records this person being a simple servant or slave, the word *doulos*, but Matthew uses a different word *pais*. This distinction might have been made by Matthew to show just how deeply that this centurion cared for this servant. It was as if this servant was of his very family.

4. This feeling of care for a servant would have separated this centurion from the other centurion's of his day. Most other men in his position would have seen themselves as high and mighty and above the cares of those under him. Most other centurions would've more than likely cast the servant to the side in favor of a new and stronger one, but this man was different in that he was willing to seek out care and healing for this servant. In fact, only the direction in which he turned might be more surprising than the care that he has for his servant in the first place.
- B. This Gentile military leader seeks help from a famed Jewish rabbi. (Matthew 8:5,6 & Luke 7:3-5)**
1. We began this lesson by considering the conflict that was often present between Jews and Gentiles during the first century, and that conflict especially was present between the Roman leadership and the Jewish people. That is one reason why it is so strange to read what we read within this text when this Roman military man seeks out a Jewish teacher of religion and faith.
 2. We are not told exactly how this centurion came to know about Jesus. We might be able to assume that he had overheard of Jesus's mighty deeds that had spread all throughout the land (**Matthew 4:24; Mark 1:28; Luke 4:37**), but it could also be that this man had heard about Jesus first hand from the Jews that he seems to have developed a relationship with. Whereas Matthew records that it is the centurion that comes to Jesus, Luke specifies that the centurion sent some Jewish elders on his behalf to Jesus to request that He come and render life-saving aid to his servant. Once they come to Jesus, they begin to build a case for why this man was worthy of Jesus aiding him in his plight. *"He is worthy for You to grant this to him; for he loves our nation and it was he who built us our synagogue."* (**Luke 7:4,5**)
 3. It is at this point that we might really begin to scratch our heads concerning how this centurion viewed and treated the Jews. Again, it is strange enough that this man is even coming to Jesus in the first place. Most of the Roman leadership wanted nothing to do with the Jews and what they viewed as foolish Jewish myths and legends. Even more so would you never find a Roman official being kind to the Jews! This man had showed extreme kindness to Jews by helping to build a place of worship for them. All of this goes to show that this man was not your ordinary Roman centurion. He seemed to not only have knowledge of Jesus, but he even seeks to request that this man be willing to come and heal his servant who was deathly ill.
- C. The centurion acknowledges the authority that Jesus possessed. (Matthew 8:7-9 & Luke 7:6-8)**
1. With all of these details before Him, Jesus makes the decision to make His way to this man's house so that he might be able to heal this centurion's servant who was at the point of death. When Jesus is just about to this man's home, He is stopped because the centurion did not feel worthy of Jesus coming into his house in such a manner.
 2. The great humility of this man led him to explain to Jesus that he understood the power and authority that Jesus possessed, and how He could just say the words and what He said would come to pass. This shows us that this man knew of the miraculous nature that resided within Jesus and that he believed that Jesus had the power to heal his servant without even being in the presence of the servant. The centurion explains his understanding of Jesus's power and authority by comparing it to his own power and authority that he as over those who were under his command. He could tell a soldier to go and he would go. He could tell a soldier to come and he would come. The soldiers would do just as they were told, and this centurion believed that whatever it was that Jesus said would be done. He had full confidence in Jesus's power and authority over sickness and healing.

D. Jesus is impressed by the centurion's faith and heals the servant at that very moment.

(Matthew 8:10-13 & Luke 7:9,10)

1. This expression of his trust in Jesus's power and authority led our Savior to take a step back and marvel at what he had just heard from this Roman centurion. To marvel at this man's faith was simply to be amazed (NET & CSB) by the level of faith and trust that this man had in Jesus's power. This level of faith might be something that Jesus would expect from those who had been a part of the following that Jesus had accrued, but there is no indication that this centurion had participated in such. Best we can tell, he had simply heard of Jesus's power and came to trust in it.
2. In fact, Jesus was so amazed that both Gospel writers record that Jesus turned to those who were with Him and spoke of how He had not found such great faith even in all of Israel. Matthew even takes it a step further by drawing his Jewish audience's attention to the great feast of the kingdom where Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob would be and how many would come from all over to be at the table with them. I believe this is a clear allusion by Jesus concerning the coming of the Gentiles into the kingdom of heaven. What makes it all the more powerful is the fact that Jesus not only speaks of the Gentiles being included, but He points out that those of Israel would be left out because of their lack of faith. This would have surely caught off guard the Jews who were listening and reading later on and really cause them to consider their own faith which I am pretty confident in saying was Jesus's point in what He said.
3. After speaking of this man's great faith, Jesus tells those coming to him from the centurion's house that they needed to go back to the house for what they had requested had been done for them. When they returned to the house, they found things to be exactly as Jesus had said they would be. At the very moment of Jesus speaking the words of healing, the servant was healed and surely all who were involved rejoiced and praised the name of God. All of this was a result of the great faith of this centurion, but we noticed that Jesus marveled at his faith. We will begin to conclude this study by trying to figure out what made this man's faith so marvelous.

II. What made the centurion's faith "marvelous"?

A. He cared for all people.

1. As a centurion this man was right near the top of the food chain. He himself stated that he had power and authority to command people as he wished. He was even so well off that he had servants! And yet we find this man being kind and caring towards his servants. Further, we find this man being kind towards those that the majority of his own countrymen hated and despised. This part of the this man's character is what seems to have led him to Jesus, and it is what led the Jews he knew to go to bat for this man to persuade Jesus to act on his behalf. The way that this man cared for all other people sure impacted the way Jesus viewed his faith.
2. Are we of the same mindset? Are we people who truly care for the wellbeing of all other people? Are we willing to sympathize with those who are hurting and struggling? Sure we might be willing to have those feelings towards those whom we are close to who are like us, but are we willing to care in the same way for people who might be "lower" than us or different from us? It is easy for us to care for our own, but are we willing to care for those who we don't have an association with?
3. Throughout the New Testament we find a theme of Jesus and the Apostles stressing the need for us to have a true sense of brotherly love about us. In fact, the second great command that we all know well is that we are to love our neighbor as ourselves. (Matthew 22:39) In Luke's account of a similar conversation, Jesus is asked, "*and who exactly is my neighbor.*" In that text of **Luke 10:29-37**, Jesus shares the story of the good Samaritan who was willing to help out the distressed man while the priest and the Levite passed by on the other side and failed to render aid. What is Jesus's point? All people are worthy of our love, and that is because all people have

been given the opportunity to come and sit around the table of the kingdom with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It doesn't matter whether we are black or white, male or female, Jew or Gentile, rich or poor, or any other fact that makes us different. If we will come to the Lord in faith all while truly loving our neighbor, whoever that may be, then we can sit at the table with Jesus, and it can be said that we too have a marvelous faith like the centurion.

B. He recognized Jesus's authority and power.

1. Secondly, this centurion had a faith that Jesus marveled at because he was willing to fully recognize that Jesus was a man of great authority and power. Again, we are not told exactly how it is that this man came to this conclusion, but we know that it was the right one. He somehow knew that Jesus was very different from other people, and that He had abilities that other simply did not have at their disposal. All He had to do was say that word and things would get done.
2. We might not know what gave this man this confidence in Jesus, but we have all of the evidence before us in easy and accessible form to be able to come to this same conclusion that Jesus has all authority. Of our course we know that Jesus claimed to have been given all authority (**Matthew 28:18**), but even prior to this claim of authority we find Jesus behaving as if He was a man of absolute authority. When He taught in the temple and synagogues, it is recorded that those who heard Him recognized that He spoke and taught with an authority all His own. (**Matthew 7:29 & Mark 1:22**)
3. Further, He had the power to be able to back up this authoritative talk. He had the power to be able to speak to the storm, "*Hush, be still*" and immediately it became still. (**Mark 4:39**) He was able to tell the lame to get up and walk...and they got up and walked. He was able to tell the dead to come forth...and they came forth. He was able to tell the demons to leave the bodies of His brethren...and they were expelled. It is one thing to speak as if you have authority, but it is another things all together to be able to back up that authoritative speech with real power, and that is exactly what Jesus did while on this earth.
4. Friends, I don't know about you...but if this Man was will to do these things with just the words that came forth out of this mouth then we must recognize that He has equal authority over us by those same words. Peter recognized that only Jesus had the words that would grant eternal life. (**John 6:68**) Peter and John recognized that it was only by the name and authority of Jesus that we can be saved from our sins. (**Acts 4:12**) No greater power does Jesus possess than to be able to wash us clean with His precious blood that we might be forgiven of all of the stain and guilt of our sins. He can and will wash us white as snow if only we will trust in His authority and power as the centurion did.

There are so many aspects of this portion of the Gospel narrative that simply don't make all that much sense. A centurion would normally never go to a Jewish religious leader for aid. He certainly wouldn't do so on behalf of a servant. Further, a Jew would hardly go out of his way to actually help that man who he would most like see as an oppressor. Then certainly you wouldn't find a man speaking a healing into existence from some distance away! Yet, what we find within these two texts are these very things taking place, and they are all a result of a man possessing a faith that saved the life of his beloved servant. Praise God for our ability to have faith in His Son that leads us to the point of faith and obedience, and may each of us come to possess such a faith that would leave Jesus just as the centurion did...marveling and amazed.