

The Miracles of Jesus
Miracle # 10

"Jesus Heals the Centurion's Servant"
(Matthew 8:5-13, Luke 7:1-10)

The miracle that we are going to consider tonight is notable because it is the first occasion in the Gospels that Jesus uses his healing power in connection with a **Gentile**. This miracle is found only in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. In both versions the healing occurs in the town of Capernaum, after Jesus has given His "*Sermon on the Mount*" on a nearby hill.

Matthew 8:5-13

"Now when Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to Him, pleading with Him, (6) saying, "Lord, my servant is lying at home paralyzed, dreadfully tormented." (7) And Jesus said to him, "I will come and heal him." (8) The centurion answered and said, "Lord, I am not worthy that You should come under my roof. But only speak a word, and my servant will be healed. (9) For I also am a man under authority, having soldiers under me. And I say to this one, "Go,' and he goes; and to another, "Come,' and he comes; and to my servant, "Do this,' and he does it." (10) When Jesus heard it, He marveled, and said to those who followed, "Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel! (11) And I say to you that many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. (12) But the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." (13) Then Jesus said to the centurion, "Go your way; and as you have believed, so let it be done for you." And his servant was healed that same hour."

Luke 7:1-10

"Now when He concluded all His sayings in the hearing of the people, He entered Capernaum. (2) And a certain centurion's servant, who was dear to him, was sick and ready to die. (3) So when he heard about Jesus, he sent elders of the Jews to Him, pleading with Him to come and heal his servant. (4) And when they came to Jesus, they begged Him earnestly, saying that the one for whom He should do this was deserving, (5) "for he loves our nation, and has built us a synagogue." (6) Then Jesus went with them. And when He was already not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to Him, saying to Him, "Lord, do not trouble Yourself, for I am not worthy that You should enter under my roof. (7) Therefore I did not even think myself worthy to come to You. But say the word, and my servant will be healed. (8) For I also am a man placed under authority, having soldiers under me. And I say to one, "Go,' and he goes; and to another, "Come,' and he comes; and to my servant, "Do this,' and he does it." (9) When Jesus heard these things, He marveled at him, and turned around and said to the crowd that followed Him, "I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!" (10) And those who were sent, returning to the house, found the servant well who had been sick."

The two accounts differ in that in Matthew the centurion himself came to present his need to Jesus. In Luke's account the centurion did not meet Jesus face to face but

instead a number of Jewish elders went as his representatives to ask Jesus to come and heal his servant.

The issue for conservative Bible believing students of the Bible is how to explain the differences between the two Gospel accounts. Since we believe that the Bible is free of error, we must also believe that there are no **unexplainable** differences between the two parallel accounts of the same incident.

There are several ways of explaining the differences between the two Gospel accounts. The first is to view the centurion as not coming initially, but as the servant became more and more critically ill, he personally came and made an appeal to Jesus.

Perhaps the primary reason for the differences between the two accounts is that they are written with different **audiences** in mind. Luke's account, addressed primarily to a **Gentile** audience, and served as an encouragement to Gentile readers because it is the faith of a Gentile is being praised.

Matthew's account, on the other hand, was written with **Jewish** audience in mind, and was a warning about the neglect of **personal** faith. In verses eleven and twelve Matthew's account says, "And I say to you that many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. (12) But the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Here Jesus warns the people of Israel against the current belief at that time that they were right with God simply because they were born Jews. Jesus tells the Jewish people that many people will come from the east and the west (that is **outside** of the Jewish nation) will have a place in the kingdom of heaven, while those trusting in their ancestry will be cast out into outer darkness. Ancestry has nothing to do with salvation. The kingdom of heaven is for those who have **personally** put their faith and trust in Jesus Christ.

Luke writing as a Gentile to Gentiles omits the warning to Israel and instead tells us how the centurion persuaded the Jewish elders to plead for him with Jesus concerning the healing of his servant.

The Background of the Miracle

As we have already noted Jesus has just completed the teaching of the "Sermon on the Mount." Now Jesus entered into Capernaum, a city on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee. While Jesus is in Capernaum, he is approached by representatives of a Roman Centurion.

A Certain Centurion. (Luke 7:2)

Roman centurions were commonplace in the Roman Empire. The centurions were the **backbone** of the Roman Army. They were not conscripts but regular soldiers who had signed on for 20 years. They were the equivalent in rank to a modern-day Army captain. The standard unit of the Roman Army was a legion, which was a force of 6,000 men which was divided into sixty 100 man centuries, each commanded by a centurion.

It is interesting to note that every Centurion mentioned in the New Testament was a **positive** picture of character and integrity. There was the centurion who at the cross recognized Jesus as the Son of God (Matt 27:54); there was Cornelius, the first Gentile convert in the book of Acts (Acts 10); there was the centurion who discovered that Paul was a Roman citizen and protected him (Acts 22); there was the centurion who received

news of a plot to kill Paul and took step to halt it (Acts 23); there was the centurion who was with Paul when he was shipwrecked on his journey to Rome (Acts 27).

"The centurion stands for all Gentile believers who never saw Jesus in the flesh, but who through faith, experienced the blessings he can bring. The centurion had not seen, yet he believed. It will be well with us if we bring to Jesus like humility, trust and faith." [William Barclay. And He Had Compassion: The Miracles of Jesus. (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1994) p. 138]

We are reminded of Jesus' words to Thomas recorded in John 20:29, when he said, "Thomas because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

The Centurion's Servant. (Luke 7:2)

"And a certain centurion's servant, who was dear to him, was sick and ready to die."

Although both passages tell us of the Centurion's servant it is literally (**doulos**) and means "**slave**." In the Roman world at that time slaves were **property**. It is hard to imagine how difficult life could be for a slave in those days, who was regarded as nothing more than a living tool, who did not possess even a single right, and who was absolutely at the mercy of the whims of the master, no matter how unreasonable or even sadistic they might be.

But such did not seem to be the situation here. This man's concern for his servant is remarkable in the age in which he lives. It was unusual for an important person to be concerned for a slave's well-being. Luke tells us that the servant was "dear" or **precious** to his master. In the case of the centurion he seemed to be more a **son** than a servant.

In Luke's account, verses six through eight, we read, "And when He was already not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to Him, saying to Him, "Lord, do not trouble Yourself, for I am not worthy that You should enter under my roof. (7) Therefore I did not even think myself worthy to come to You. But say the word, and my servant will be healed. (8) For I also am a man placed under authority, having soldiers under me. And I say to one, "Go,' and he goes; and to another, "Come,' and he comes; and to my servant, "Do this,' and he does it."

The centurion as a man of authority, believed that **disease's** had to obey Christ's bidding just as he had to obey his superior officer's and those under his authority had to obey him. He recognized Jesus as possessing great spiritual authority and was convinced that he would be able to implement healing by merely speaking the word. The centurion's words made a deep impression on Jesus.

The Centurion's Great Faith. (Luke 7:9)

"When Jesus heard these things, He marveled at him, and turned around and said to the crowd that followed Him, "I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel."

There are two instances of faith which were called "**great faith**" by Jesus both of whom were demonstrated by **Gentiles** (the Roman Centurion here and the Syro-Phoenician woman (Matt. 15:28).

But why is it considered great?

(1) It was great when it is considered in **whom** this faith was found. This Gentile's faith was more perceptive and sensitive than any that Jesus had witnessed in Israel. In Luke's

account in verse three, it says that, "when he heard about Jesus" clearly implying that when what he had heard he had believed. The Jewish people had witnessed Jesus' miracles and had wondered, the centurion had heard of Jesus miracles and had **believed**.

(2) It was great in its demonstration of faith in Jesus' **power**.

(3) It was great in **dependence** of Jesus alone.

This centurion has a thoroughly practical faith. He does not talk of his love for the Jewish nation, he builds them a synagogue. When his servant is sick he does not talk about his pity, he sends for the physician. He does not merely speak of his faith, he shows it in such a way that even the Lord marvels at it.

The Elements of the Miracle

If we combine elements of the two accounts it would unfold this way. Jesus came to Capernaum and in the town was a centurion whose servant was gravely ill. The centurion who had heard of Jesus but did not think it proper to approach him, therefore he asked the Jewish elders to speak to Jesus for him. This the elders willingly did because the centurion had proven himself to be such a friend to the Jewish people. This friendship had been proven by the centurion's willingness to build a synagogue for the Jews to worship in. When Jesus received word of the appeal he immediately set out to the centurion's home, but before he could arrive, messenger's from the centurion meet Him, stating that his house was not a fit place for Jesus to enter (the centurion being a Gentile). A few moments later the centurion himself arrives. He had become so concerned about the condition of his servant that he had set out himself to see Jesus. When he arrived he expresses his confidence that Jesus need only say the word and his servant would be healed. The centurion knew the principle of authority and he recognized the spiritual authority in Jesus. If Jesus would but give the order, he was sure that his servant would be healed. Jesus turns to the crowd and says, "Not even in Israel have I seen such faith." When the centurion and his friends returned home they found the servant cured.

The Effects of the Miracle (Luke 7:10)

"And those who were sent, returning to the house, found the servant well who had been sick."

According to Matthew's account in verse thirteen, Jesus said "Go your way; and as you have believed, so let it be done for you." In other words he said that it the healing was according to the centurion's faith (as you have believed). But we need to note here that Jesus did not give the principle "**as you have believed**" as a **universal** promise of healing to all Christian's who just believe.

Such an instantaneous cure wrought on the patient for a distance is rare among the healing miracles of the Bible. In fact it is one of only **three** miracles recorded that were performed from a **distance** (the others being the nobleman's son (John 4:46-54) and the Syro-Phoenician's daughter (Mark 7:24-30.)