

Great Faith 7-4-04

Matthew 8:5-17 (NIV)

⁵When Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him, asking for help. ⁶"Lord," he said, "my servant lies at home paralyzed and in terrible suffering."⁷ Jesus said to him, "I will go and heal him."⁸ The centurion replied, "Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed. ⁹For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and that one, 'Come,' and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it."¹⁰ When Jesus heard this, he was astonished and said to those following him, "I tell you the truth, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith. ¹¹I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. ¹²But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."¹³ Then Jesus said to the centurion, "Go! It will be done just as you believed it would." And his servant was healed at that very hour.

¹⁴When Jesus came into Peter's house, he saw Peter's mother-in-law lying in bed with a fever. ¹⁵He touched her hand and the fever left her, and she got up and began to wait on him. ¹⁶When evening came, many who were demon-possessed were brought to him, and he drove out the spirits with a word and healed all the sick. ¹⁷This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: "He took up our infirmities and carried our diseases."

From reading Mark's account of this day, we find that this took place on the Sabbath. (Mark 1:29-31) Jesus had delivered a man from demonic influence in the Synagogue. (Mark 1:23-26) Matthew tells us that in going from the Synagogue to Peter's home, a centurion came to Jesus with a request.

Archeology has discovered in the ruins of Capernaum, the remains of Roman barracks that existed around the time of Christ. Keep in mind that this is a real story, in a real town, with real characters facing life just like we do.

Centurions are always mentioned positively in Scripture. The one at the cross declared that Jesus was surely the Son of God. (Matthew 27:54) A centurion was the first Gentile convert in Scripture. (Acts 10:1-2) Centurions saved Paul from the Jews' plot to kill him. (Acts 23:17) They were in charge of a hundred men. Sixty of these groups made up a Legion. They were said to be the moral of the army in peace or in war and are referred to as the backbone of the Roman armies.

This centurion was very unique. In Rome, the slave was thought of as a tool. Aristotle, talking about the friendships which are possible in life, writes:

"There can be no friendship nor justice towards inanimate things; indeed, not even towards a horse or an ox, nor yet towards a slave as a slave. For master and slave have nothing in common; a slave is a living tool, just as a tool is an inanimate slave."
—Barclay's Daily Study Bible (NT)

Commented [notes1]: ²⁹As soon as they left the synagogue, they went with James and John to the home of Simon and Andrew.

³⁰Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told Jesus about her. ³¹So he went to her, took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her and she began to wait on them. Mark 1:29-31 (NIV)

Commented [notes2]: ²³Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an evil spirit cried out, ²⁴"What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are--the Holy One of God!"

²⁵"Be quiet!" said Jesus sternly. "Come out of him!" ²⁶The evil spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek. Mark 1:23-26 (NIV)

Commented [notes3]: ⁵⁴When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, "Surely he was the Son of God!" Matt 27:54 (NIV)

Commented [notes4]: ¹At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion in what was known as the Italian Regiment. ²He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those Acts 10:1-2 (NIV)

Commented [notes5]: ¹⁷Then Paul called one of the centurions unto him, and said, Bring this young man unto the chief captain: for he hath a certain thing to tell him. Acts 23:17 (KJV)

For a Roman to care about a slave as anything more than his value as an instrument was very unusual. This centurion seems to be greatly concerned about his slave's suffering.

Luke's gospel tells us that he was favorable toward the Jews, even helping them to build the synagogue in Capernaum. (Luke 7:4-5) The footings of that synagogue are still there in the ruins of Capernaum.

Not only does he have an unusual attitude toward his slave and toward the Jews, but also he has an unusual attitude toward this poor rabbi. He came to plead with a poor Jewish rabbi for help. That in and of itself was humbling. Rome was proud of its abilities and self-sufficiency and yet here is this man who leads a hundred soldiers asking a poor Jew for help. After all, Rome was ruling Palestine. But pride didn't stop this man. He had seen or heard something that gave him hope that this rabbi, Yeshua, could do something for his slave.

Jesus has a heart for the suffering. (Matthew 14:14) Right away, He said that He would go. Now that was difficult for the Jew to hear. The house of the Gentile was considered unclean. To enter it meant that you would become defiled. This was not a clear cut Levitical Law, but rather something that man had added for the intended purpose of protecting the Law. Jesus could have argued that technically it wasn't in the Law, but He probably would still have been thought defiled in most Jews' minds. That didn't matter to Jesus. What mattered was the servant was suffering and the centurion had come to Him for help. Jesus doesn't hesitate, "I will go and heal him." Do you see how ready He is to help all who come to Him? May God grant us Jesus' love for our fellow man and lack of concern for the opinions of men.

Many a Jew was probably aghast at Jesus' readiness to help a leader of the occupying power on the Sabbath, even if he was a benefactor of the synagogue. The life of Jesus constantly confronts us with His rejection of man's traditions in favor of His Father's heart. But what happened next was even more radical.

The centurion knew of Jewish tradition. He didn't want to damage Jesus' reputation. He quickly offered an alternative action, and gave an illustration.
"Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed. ⁹For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and that one, 'Come,' and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it."

He was saying that he believed Jesus only needed to speak it. Consider how great his faith was. Has there been anything in the Gospel to this point that would suggest Jesus could command something done some distance away? The modern mind doesn't find this to be such a stretch, but for a person of Jesus' day it expressed an incredible trust in the power of Jesus' word. His illustration shows us how he was thinking. The centurion said that it would be like him commanding his soldiers. In other words, the world of matter is at Jesus' command! In a broader sense, he was declaring that he believed that Jesus could say anything and it would happen. He was absolutely right. He is the word that made it all. (Hebrews 1:2-3) He may have had in mind that the

Commented [notes6]: ⁴When they came to Jesus, they pleaded earnestly with him, "This man deserves to have you do this, ⁵because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue."
Luke 7:4-5 (NIV)

Commented [notes7]: ¹⁴When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick.
Matthew 14:14 (NIV)

Commented [notes8]: ²but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. ³The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.
Hebrews 1:2-3 (NIV)

servant had a "spirit of infirmity", that there was a spiritual power of sickness that Jesus had to but order to leave the servant.

Jesus was astonished at the faith of this Roman soldier. He called it "great faith". Not one single Jew had expressed such faith in Him. They had seen Him heal, cast out evil spirits, and heard His perfect teaching, and yet they did not express the faith of this Roman. It caused Jesus to make a statement that probably angered the Jews. ¹¹"I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. ¹²But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

It is the theme of the New Testament. Faith is what gets you a seat in the Kingdom of God. It isn't your nationality, your occupation, your ancestry, your good deeds or anything else. (Ephesians 2:8-9)

The Jews looked forward to the great banquet of God. They foresaw a day when the Messiah would reign, and God would cause all enemies of Israel to perish. (Isaiah 60:12) In their vision of heaven, the table was filled with Jews. The thought of a Roman there would not cross their mind. If they had only looked a little more closely at the throne of David, as they rightly believed the Messiah's kingdom would be a restoration of the throne of David. (1 Chronicles 17:11-14) Had they looked closely at David's kingdom, they would have seen that the king's most loyal supporters were Gentiles. (2 Samuel 15:19-21)

Jesus was teaching a lesson that would ring throughout the New Testament. It is by faith that one enters into a relationship with God. Jews who thought they were guaranteed a place at the table would find themselves in the darkness they thought was reserved for the Gentile. How shocking Jesus' statement was to their ears!

Faith is the invisible hand of our will that reaches out and clings to a spiritual reality that we hold to be true. (Hebrews 11:1) The centurion believed Jesus was the authority of heaven and needed only to speak for the suffering of his servant to end. ¹³Then Jesus said to the centurion, "Go! It will be done just as you believed it would." And his servant was healed at that very hour.

It will be done just as you believed it would. Great faith gets great results. Great faith isn't something you can work up. It's like being a little bit pregnant. You are or you aren't. You have faith because you are convinced, or you don't have it. Are you convinced that the word of Jesus can do anything? You are or you aren't.

I think we don't see more people healed because we aren't quite sure if we believe that or not. Many of the students I met in India came to Christ because they or a family member were healed when it seemed hopeless. Doctors couldn't help, witchdoctors couldn't help, but when a minister of God came and prayed, they were healed. But we are too sophisticated for that. Great faith believes that when Jesus gives the command, it is carried out. It was the centurion's belief in the power of Jesus' word that was the conduit for healing power of Jesus.

Commented [notes9]: ⁸For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God--
⁹not by works, so that no one can boast.
Ephesians 2:8-9 (NIV)

Commented [notes10]: ¹²For the nation or kingdom that will not serve you will perish; it will be utterly ruined.
Isaiah 60:12 (NIV)

Commented [notes11]: ¹¹When your days are over and you go to be with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, one of your own sons, and I will establish his kingdom.
¹²He is the one who will build a house for me, and I will establish his throne forever.
¹³I will be his father, and he will be my son. I will never take my love away from him, as I took it away from your predecessor.
¹⁴I will set him over my house and my kingdom forever; his throne will be established forever."
1 Chronicles 17:11-14 (NIV)

Commented [notes12]: ¹⁹The king said to Ittai the Gittite, "Why should you come along with us? Go back and stay with King Absalom. You are a foreigner, an exile from your homeland.
²⁰You came only yesterday. And today shall I make you wander about with us, when I do not know where I am going? Go back, and take your countrymen. May kindness and faithfulness be with you."
²¹But Ittai replied to the king, "As surely as the LORD lives, and as my lord the king lives, wherever my lord the king may be, whether it means life or death, there will your servant be."
2 Samuel 15:19-21 (NIV)

Commented [notes13]: ¹Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.
Hebrews 11:1 (NIV)

Is there a difficulty in your life that is grieving your heart? Is it something you know would break Jesus' heart as well? Take it to Him. (Ephesians 3:12) I've never seen a place in Scripture where He rejected someone who came to Him for help. He might test you to increase your faith, but He won't turn you away. Tell Him your need. Then tell Him you know His word can do anything. Ask Him to speak to your situation. His word makes it happen. *"Go! It will be done just as you believed it would."*

Commented [notes14]: ¹²In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.
Ephesians 3:12 (NIV)

Now lest we think that we have the formula down pat, let us move on to the next miracle. Remember, He has just come down from the Sermon on the Mount. His actions are giving credence to His word. Here comes miracle number three. First we had the leper, then the centurion's servant, and now the mother-in-law of Peter in Peter's home. We know the exact spot with a reasonable degree of certainty. After Pentecost it became a place of worship and later turned into a church. There is a catholic church suspended above the spot today.

Peter was a married man. The Bible tells us nothing about his wife, but early church history recorded that she helped him in his ministry and was crucified with him. (see Clement of Alexandria (Stromateis 7: 6)) They record that he was made to watch her crucifixion before his own. He encouraged her to hope in the Lord as she suffered. But here we are a few decades earlier at the bedside of his wife's mother. Now there is no crowd to observe this, nothing to be gained, just a woman with a fever. Malaria was common in the area, and it well may have been that.

The touch of Jesus restored her health. Sickness can't stay where He touches. Everything He touches is made whole. She was different from the centurion and the leper. She didn't come to Him; He came to her. No request from her is mentioned. Jesus chose to reach out and touch her, and she rose up and served Him! She didn't just rise and stand around marveling. We are saved to serve. We are healed to help. We are touched by Jesus for a reason, and that reason is not to sit around serving our self. We were made whole for a reason. What have you done since Jesus touched you? What is God calling you to do?

That was a long day for Jesus! But it isn't over yet. Now that it is evening, it is no longer the Sabbath. At the sight of the first two stars the Sabbath has ended and people are free to travel about, and healing is permitted by the Jewish traditions. Their laws even insisted that you should not heal on the Sabbath, but could only keep the person from getting worse. Jesus never kept to those man made laws.

¹⁶When evening came, many who were demon-possessed were brought to him, and he drove out the spirits with a word and healed all the sick. Mark tells us, The whole town gathered at the door... (Mark 1:33 (NIV)

A few miraculous healings and all the desperate people showed up hoping to be made well. I know some people I would have brought. There are some in our congregation I would rush to His door, and we continue to do so in prayer.

Those who were demon-possessed were healed with a word. I imagine that word was "Out!" Mark tells us that Jesus wouldn't let the demons say anything. (Mark 1:34) Today we might diagnose these people as schizophrenics, but why would

Commented [notes15]: ³⁴and Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons, but he would not let the demons speak because they knew who he was.
Mark 1:34 (NIV)

all the schizophrenics recognize Jesus to be the Son of God? There is more going on than science can explain. This is the realm of the supernatural.

"*And healed all the sick.*" I love that little expression. ALL! There is not one problem that Jesus can't resolve. There is no darkness that can withstand His light. There is no illness too powerful to resist His healing touch. Nothing! Absolutely nothing is too difficult for Him. If that doesn't give you hope, then you don't believe the Word of God. The flip side is that if He chooses not to heal you, then there must be a very good reason. It is never because He is incapable. He is Jehovah Rapha – the Lord that heals. (Exodus 15:26) Jesus was showing Himself to be the God of the Old Testament. We could go through all the names of God and see how Jesus demonstrated Himself to be them all.

Matthew said that this was to fulfill what Isaiah had written, "*He took up our infirmities and carried our diseases.*" He was quoting Isaiah 53:4, but translations from the Hebrew read "sorrows" instead of "diseases". "Sorrows" is even broader. Certainly "diseases" is covered under the sorrows we have in life. This identified Jesus of Nazareth as the suffering servant that Isaiah had written about. There were other "healers" in Jesus' day, but none had that little word connected with their work – "all". Jesus healed **all** that came to Him.

That prophecy is so large that it covers all time as well. Jesus took up your infirmities and mine and carried our sorrows. Isaiah wrote that looking centuries ahead and yet wrote in the past tense. We look centuries back and find He welcomes us to the door of Peter's home. You may have to wait your turn, but He will see you. The more people you see walking away praising God the more excited you should be for your turn to come. I think this word came in God's perfect time for our loss of Rena. We know she is with the Lord and yet we sorrow at the loss of her fellowship. Jesus carries our sorrow.

Dr. Mathai told me a story of the early days of his ministry in which a stolen car ran a light and hit him broadside. There were fractures through the vertebrae in his neck and he was experiencing difficulty. The doctors told him he had to have surgery or he risked being completely paralyzed. The surgeon told him he had a 50-50 chance of coming out of the operation whole. He decided to go to Jesus instead. Better odds. He was completely healed.

We haven't seen any startling miraculous healings, but I expect them because Jesus is the same today as He was that day in Capernaum. We have seen some miraculous healings of the heart. That is the worse kind of infirmity and the Lord has done some wonderful healings among us.

Now, I'm not telling you to avoid doctors. Many times they are God's hands of healing. But do go to Jesus. He took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows. You don't have to carry them alone; in fact, you don't even have to carry them. He'll carry them for you. Will you go to the door of Peter's house this morning and tell Jesus about your infirmity or sorrow and see God's word fulfilled? Go with the faith of the centurion and tell Him. "Lord, I don't deserve for you to come under my roof, but just say the word and I will be healed, my sorrow will be carried, my infirmity taken up." He will meet you there in prayer. Your hand of faith can take hold of the unseen reality.

Commented [notes16]: ²⁶He said, "If you listen carefully to the voice of the LORD your God and do what is right in his eyes, if you pay attention to his commands and keep all his decrees, I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians, for I am the LORD, who heals you."
Exodus 15:26 (NIV)