The Believing Centurion

Matt 8:5-13
SS Lesson for 07/05/2026

Devotional Scriptures: Matt 15:22-28

OUTLINE

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Background from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary
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Lesson Background and Key Verse

Background from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Today's lesson comes shortly after the Sermon on the Mount. In Matthew 5-7, Jesus gives an authoritative interpretation of the Torah (or Jewish Law), explaining the ethics of God's kingdom. The sermon includes Jesus' self-identification as "Lord," to whom everyone owes obedience and allegiance (7:21-23). Jesus compares his teachings to a foundation stone (7:24). His words are like the ground on which one might stand; they ensure the stability of whoever lives by them (7:24-27). As Jesus descends from the mount, a "leper" approaches him (Matthew 8:2). The Torah, which Jesus just showed authority to interpret, contains purity laws that regulate contact with those who are sick. Anyone with visible disease struggled day-to-day, facing the prospect of making others ritually impure. The man's request for cleansing reveals faith in Jesus' authority over sickness and death. Thus, when Jesus responds by cleansing the man with a touch, Jesus accepts ritual impurity (8:3). Simultaneously, he displays the capacity to heal the diseases that the Law of Moses carefully regulated. Jesus demonstrates healing with a touch, setting the stage for a second healing without physical contact.

Key Verse: Matt 8:10

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!

Major Theme Analysis

(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)

Belief in Need and Faith (Matt 8:5-9)

5 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."

Need for healing (5-6)

A healing physically (Matt 14:14)

14 When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick.

A healing spiritually (Isa 53:5)

5 But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.

A healing that Jesus proved His Divinity (Matt 11:2-5)

2 When John heard in prison what Christ was doing, he sent his disciples 3 to ask him, "Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?" 4 Jesus replied, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: 5 The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor.

A healing through His abiding (John 15:1-4)

1 "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. 2 He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. 3 You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. 4 Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

A healing through growth in faith (2 Thess 1:3)

3 We ought always to thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love every one of you has for each other is increasing.

Jesus answered request (7)

Answered because God's eyes are on the righteous (Ps 34:15)

15 The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their cry;

Answered because God promises to answer even before speaking (Isa 65:24)

24 Before they call I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear.

Answered because God promises to fulfill answers and seeking (Matt 7:7-8)

7 "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. 8 For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.

Answered because of obedience (1 John 3:21-22)

21 Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God 22 and receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him.

Unworthiness expressed (8)

Unworthy because we sometimes put others before God (Matt 10:37)

37 "Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me;

Unworthy because Jesus is so much more holy and powerful (Luke 3:16)

16 John answered them all, "I baptize you with water. But one more powerful than I will come, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

Unworthy because of sin (Luke 15:21)

21 "The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'

Unworthy because God loved us when we were His enemy (Rom 5:8)

8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Centurion's understanding of authority (9)

Authority to drive out demons (Matt 10:1)

1 He called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness.

Authority in heaven and on earth (Matt 28:17-18)

17 When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. 18 Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

Authority over life and death (John 10:17-18)

17 The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life, only to take it up again. 18 No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father."

Authority to give eternal life (John 17:1-2)

> 17 After Jesus said this, he looked toward heaven and prayed: "Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. 2 For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him.

Belief Manifested (Matt 8:10-13)

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.

Manifested to include the gentiles (10-11)

Gentiles included because Jesus will glorify them (Isa 11:10)

> 10 In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his place of rest will be glorious.

Gentiles included through repentance that leads to eternal live (Acts 11:17-18)

> 17 So if God gave them the same gift as he gave us, who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could oppose God?" 18 When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, "So then, God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life."

Gentiles included to glorify God (Rom 15:8-9)

> 8 For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God's truth, to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs 9 so that the Gentiles may glorify God for his mercy, as it is written: "Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles; I will sing hymns to your name."

Gentiles included because in Christ all are one (Gal 3:28-29)

> 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Manifested to exclude some Israelites (12)

Israelites excluded because of not producing good fruit (Matt 3:9-10)

> 9 And do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. 10 The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

Israelites excluded because of rejecting Jesus (Matt 21:42-43)

> 42 Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures: '"The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes'? 43 "Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit.

Israelites excluded because salvation is not because of being Abraham's descendants (Rom 9:6-8)

> 6 It is not as though God's word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. 7 Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children. On the contrary, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." 8 In other words, it is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring.

Israelites excluded because of lack of knowledge of who Jesus was (Rom 10:1-2)

> 1 Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. 2 For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge.

Manifested regardless of distance (13)

Regardless of distance and time (John 4:49-52)

> 49 The royal official said, "Sir, come down before my child dies." 50 Jesus replied, "You may go. Your son will live." The man took Jesus at his word and departed. 51 While he was still on the way, his servants met him with the news that his boy was living. 52 When he inquired as to the time when his son got better, they said to him, "The fever left him yesterday at the seventh hour."

Regardless of distance and worthiness (Mark 7:26-30)

> 26 The woman was a Greek, born in Syrian Phoenicia. She begged Jesus to drive the demon out of her daughter. 27 "First let the children eat all they want," he told her, "for it is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs." 28 "Yes, Lord," she replied, "but even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." 29 Then he told her, "For such a reply, you may go; the demon has left your daughter." 30 She went home and found her child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

Regardless of distance but it takes obedience (Luke 17:12-14)

> 12 As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance 13 and called out in a loud voice, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!" 14 When he saw them, he said, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were cleansed.

Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Commentary Thoughts from Bob Deffinbaugh

Healing the Centurion's Servant Matthew 8:5-13

This healing is described in considerably greater detail than is the healing of the leper (nine verses, as opposed to three). It must therefore be important. Let us first note that the central figure (other than our Lord) is a centurion. These men were soldiers, commanders of 100 men. They were there in Israel to maintain the peace. Centurions are always looked upon favorably in the New Testament. What is most important to observe here is that the centurion was a Gentile. I am reasonably convinced that the centurion's servant (literally "boy") was a Jew. After all, who would we expect to be a servant to this Gentile, in Israel? I would not at all be surprised if this servant was the means by which the centurion came to embrace Judaism. Besides this, Jesus must have come up often in the briefings that this centurion must have held for his men. Their job was to maintain security in this occupied land. Any potential trouble maker would surely be kept under careful scrutiny. Luke informs us that this slave was "**highly regarded**" by the centurion (Luke 7:2). We can see the centurion's regard by his extraordinary efforts to procure a healing for his servant, and thus an end to his excruciating pain (Matthew 8:6).

Let us take note of the fact that the centurion is not asking for anything for himself. He is deeply moved by the suffering of his servant. It may be that this Gentile believed Jesus had come only to bless His people, the Jews. Since he was not seeking anything personally, but was only asking for Jesus to heal his (Jewish) servant, he seems to be confident that Jesus might grant his petition. Once more we find that Jesus is willing to help. The centurion's words have barely been uttered when Jesus responds, "**I will come and heal him**" (8:7).

It seems that this caught the centurion off guard. He was all too aware of the barrier that that law created between Jews and Gentiles. One need only read the account of what it took to get Peter to the house of Cornelius, also a centurion (Acts 10), to understand the magnitude of this barrier. He did want Jesus to heal his servant, but how could he expect Jesus to defile himself by entering his home? (Little did the centurion know that Jesus had just touched a leper.) This was not a deficiency in the centurion's faith; it was his humble acceptance of his status as a Gentile.

How different the request of the centurion is from that of the royal official in John 4:46-50. In this case, the official specifically asks Jesus to come to his home to heal his son, who is about to die. The centurion pled with Jesus not to come to his home. There were two reasons for this.

First, he was unworthy to have Jesus enter his household (Matthew 8:8). Why should he presume to ask Jesus to defile Himself by coming to his home? The second reason is even better: there was no need for Jesus to come to his home. The centurion recognized our Lord's authority. Our Lord's authority was so great that He need not come to his home. He need only speak a word and heal Jesus from a distance.

The centurion was himself a man with a measure of authority. When he ordered men under his command to do something, they did it. The authority of Jesus was infinitely greater. Why should He defile Himself by coming to this man's house when He could heal him from where He stood?

The centurion gets far more than he asks for, and this is a result of his faith, not his authority as a commanding officer in an occupation army. We should remember that this man asked nothing for himself, only for his (Jewish?) servant. And yet he receives two of the finest blessings for which a man could ever hope.

First, the centurion receives the highest praise any man, Jew or Gentile, receives in the Gospels: "**I tell you the truth, I have not found such faith in anyone in Israel!**" (verse 10) This Gentile's faith surpasses that of any Jew in Israel, and it receives the commendation of our Lord. Second, this man receives the Lord's promise of inclusion and fellowship that he would never have imagined. The centurion did not consider himself worthy (qualified) to have Jesus pass through his door. But look what Jesus promises him, in response to his faith:

11 "I tell you, many will come from the east and west to share the banquet with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, 12 but the sons of the kingdom will be thrown out into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matthew 8:11-12).

More than anything else, it was the Old Testament ceremonial food laws that separated Jews and Gentiles. That is what we see in the case of Peter, both in Acts 10 and in Galatians 2. This man could not conceive of Jesus entering his door, much less sitting at his table. But Jesus tells him that in the kingdom he will be sitting at the table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He also says that while many Gentiles will be found at this table, a number of Jews will not be there.

Now that our Lord has died at Calvary, and has risen from the dead and ascended to the Father; now that the New Testament epistles have been written, we can understand how all this would come to pass. First of all, this centurion surely has blessed the offspring of Abraham:

1 Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go out from your country, your relatives, and your father's household to the land that I will show you. 2 Then I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you, and I will make your name great, so that you will exemplify divine blessing. 3 I will bless those who bless you, but the one who treats you lightly I must curse, and all the families of the earth will bless one another by your name" (Genesis 12:1-3).

Are we surprised, then, to see that our Lord promises blessings to him?

Most importantly, in the context of Matthew's account, it is not one's ethnicity that determines one's eternal destiny, but his faith. John the Baptist made it clear that many Jews would not enter into the kingdom of heaven, but rather into eternal judgment:

7 But when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "You offspring of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? 8 Therefore produce fruit that proves your repentance, 9 and don't think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you that God can raise up children for Abraham from these stones! 10 Even now the ax is laid at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire" (Matthew 3:7-10).

The issue is not one's racial origins, and not even one's works, but faith in Jesus as the promised Messiah. This is what makes one a true offspring of Abraham:

13 For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would inherit the world was not fulfilled through the law, but through the righteousness that comes by faith. 14 For if they become heirs by the law, faith is empty and the promise is nullified. 15 For the law brings wrath, because where there is no law there is no transgression either. 16 For this reason it is by faith so that it may be by grace, with the result that the promise may be certain to all the descendants—not only to those who are under the law, but also to those who have the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all 17 (as it is written, "I have made you the father of many nations"). He is our father in the presence of God whom he believed—the God who makes the dead alive and summons the things that do not yet exist as though they already do (Romans 4:13-17).

This centurion, who sought the Lord's mercy toward his servant, came to Him on the basis of faith, and it is this faith which not only healed the servant, but saved the centurion. Most of those who read this sermon will be Gentiles. This passage (buttressed by later New Testament revelation) tells us how Gentiles (and Jews) can – indeed must – be saved. Are these not the sweetest words we could ever hear? What a wonderful Savior!

Adapted from URL:https://bible.org/seriespage/20-leper-gentile-and-little-old-lady-matthew-81-17)

Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

The centurion in today's lesson gives us a refreshing example of approaching God properly. Our methodology is critical as we intercede for those who are suffering. The centurion showcases essential aspects of a faithful petition: acknowledge Jesus as Lord, submit to God's authority, and do so with great humility. The centurion also appeals to the Lord's mercy. He holds complete confidence in Jesus' ability to alleviate suffering, even from a distance. This story demonstrates that we can be confident like the centurion, in Christ's authority over sickness, death, and every power. This story shows that faith sees beyond the physical to perceive spiritual realities that are deep and salient. Faith perceives Jesus' divine jurisdiction; faith gives us boldness to act with adept confidence; faith makes us children of God.