

## “Many Will Come” – Matthew 8:5-13

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preached 8/5/12 – Calvary Baptist Church, Lamar, CO

### (1) Background: The centurion

Centurions in the army – the backbone of the empire – not officers from the senatorial or knightly class, but men of merit, patriotism, and honor – company commanders

This centurion – probably in charge of the Capernaum garrison, keeping the peace along the lake highway – This is the town where Jesus made his headquarters and in which He did many miracles of healing.

This centurion – according to Luke he is represented by elders of the town, who tell Jesus that he is “worthy” of help, that he loves God’s people and had personally financed the building of a synagogue

But still a Gentile – not a member of covenant of Israel, not a keeper of the Law, his precise level of belief unknown – possibly a “God-fearer” who read the prophets...

### (2) The centurion’s faith

#### - Brings him to appeal to Christ (6)

The centurion’s young servant is near death. The servant is, legally, the officer’s slave, but he has become not only a highly valued assistant; he is the centurion’s dear friend. In verse 7 the centurion refers to the servant as “my child”, a not uncommon term for a servant, meaning “my servant boy.” But here it clearly carries overtones of paternal concern. The servant was like a son to the centurion. And now he is terribly sick. Matthew says that he was paralyzed and in great pain; Luke says that he was about to die. His situation is desperate. There is in this world no hope for him. His master – his boss, who is like a father to him – has nowhere to turn. Time is running out. But this crisis will prove to be the greatest blessing in their entire lives.

- The fact is that our situation is always hopeless without divine intervention: For this reason a moment of crisis can be a great blessing.

#### - Causes him to be humble before Christ (8a)

Great faith results in **great humility before Jesus**. The centurion is apparently the head of the military police force in Capernaum, the city where Jesus has his headquarters. As such, he is the chief representative not only of the Roman Empire in this district. Although his work would require him to have diplomatic skill in dealing with the locals, he is not someone who would seem to have much to be humble about. But he is also a man who has heard about Jesus.

- He requests that Jesus not come to his home to heal his servant, because, he says, “I am not worthy to have you come under my roof.” This is the same language used by John the Baptist to describe his relationship to Christ, when he says, “I am not worthy to loosen his sandals.”
- He offers Jesus no reason why he deserves a favor; much less does he make a promise of what he will do in return. He asks for the pure, undeserved grace that he needs for his young friend to be healed. **True faith always asks for pure grace** – and pure grace, totally undeserved mercy, is all that Jesus offers.

- We have that heard that Jesus desires not only to enter our homes but also our hearts. And supposedly we have a much clearer understanding, in theory, of who Jesus is. But do we really understand what it means that He is the Son of God? Is it reflected in the way we act toward Him, in the way we pray, in the way we worship, or in the way we live? Are the awe and the humility before Jesus missing because we really do not have much faith in what the Bible says about who Jesus is?
- What this faith is: absolute confidence in Christ and in His authority and power (8b-9)
  - He knows that Jesus has the power to heal if He would “only say the word” (lit, “Say in a word”.) He cannot know what we do: That Jesus is the eternal Word of God, and that it was by His word that the universe itself was formed. The mere word of Jesus is infinitely powerful. His will shall be done.
  - A centurion understands what authority is. For him it is a simple matter. Jesus’ own followers are astonished and terrified when He calms the sea, casts out a demon, and raises the dead with just a word, and they are puzzled how He can accomplish His purposes without armies or political power. But the military man, who has control of all the muscle in the town of Capernaum – this Gentile who knows that there is one God – this Roman who believes in the God of the Bible – He gets it. In the army, he says, the commander just commands, and those under him do his will. I have experience with that from both sides. It is quite simple. So, you, Jesus, you have evidently received from God the Father authority over sickness and death and much more. All I can do is ask. You are the great Commander, and I am simply a humble petitioner. But since you are apparently willing to show me your mercy, all I am asking you to do is issue the command.
  - Notice that the centurion, unlike many religious people in his day and ours, asks for no signs, no ceremony, no waving of the hand or magical words. He wants nothing from Jesus to strengthen his faith. He simply asks Jesus, the mighty Lord and Deliverer, to say the word. Jesus has not seen such faith even in Israel.
  - You know a lot more about Jesus than the centurion of Capernaum. But how much authority do you believe that Jesus has? Does He have the power to do what He says He will do? To solve the impossible problem? To put right the most broken situation? Does He still have power over death and destruction and sickness and misery? Is He mightier than the powers of evil? Does He have the right and the power to save a sinner?
  - This has nothing to do with Jesus delegating any of His power to anyone else. There are some who will try to tell you that they – or perhaps you, as a really sincere person with the right amount or kind of faith, have some sort of authority. This is very dangerous talk that can lead to tremendous abuse. Jesus delegates very little of His authority. It is on Him not on yourself or someone else you must depend.

### (3) Jesus’ amazement (10)

Jesus is hardly ever described as amazed at people. We are told, on the contrary, that he knew what was in the heart of man, and we on more than one occasion he is aware of what is in the minds of those who oppose him. There is only one other place where Jesus is said to have expressed wonder or amazement. In Mark 6:6, at the conclusion of the story of His rejection by

the people of his hometown of Nazareth, we are told that “He wondered at their unbelief.” It is not that Jesus has come across something that was outside of His divine knowledge, so that He is taken by surprise. But God Himself finds it astounding and appalling that He could come unto His own and His own receive not receive Him.

*The priests did not say, 'Where is the LORD?' Those who handle the law did not know me; the shepherds transgressed against me; the prophets prophesied by Baal and went after things that do not profit. "Therefore I still contend with you, declares the LORD, and with your children's children I will contend. For cross to the coasts of Cyprus and see, or send to Kedar and examine with care; see if there has been such a thing. Has a nation changed its gods, even though they are no gods? But my people have changed their glory for that which does not profit. Be appalled, O heavens, at this; be shocked, be utterly desolate, declares the LORD, for my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water. (Jeremiah 2:8-13)*

Jesus finds it amazing, shocking even if, to Him who knows the prophets better than anyone and who knows as no one else does what is in the heart of man – still he finds it shocking and scandalous that the people of Israel, even the people of Nazareth and of Capernaum, do not believe in Him, their Messiah, among whom He lived and taught and did miracles.

We are shocked by the condition of the world. But Jesus is shocked by the unbelief of those who have sat under the teaching of His word, and who call themselves His people. The world hates us, and we think it is a shocking piece of front-page news, even though it is exactly what Jesus told us would happen. But when members of the church of Jesus Christ, the sons of the kingdom, place their confidence and their hope in the things of this world, and fail to trust in the power and authority of their Lord and Savior, heaven itself is appalled.

**Notice** that what Jesus regards as a lack of faith in Israel is their rejection of **Him**.

- The unbelief in Israel
- The faith of this Gentile

But it is said here that He marveled at the words and the faith of the one who did believe – this Roman soldier. The unbelief of mankind is astonishing, but the grace of God in drawing impossible cases to Himself is even more amazing.

#### (5) Jesus' promise (11)

Apart from the magi who came to visit Him in Bethlehem, this Roman centurion is the first Gentile to believe in Jesus. Jesus now promises that he will not be the last.

Many will come, He says. John, who heard these words as a very young man, near the end of his long life, in a prison camp on an island in the Aegean Sea, saw in a vision the fulfillment of this promise, and recorded that it was a multitude that no one could number. God promised Abraham that his children would be like the sand on the shore and the stars in the sky for number.

They will come. In Capernaum by the shores of Galilee, rejected by those He grew up with in Nazareth, His gracious words and glorious miracles still ignored by many of his own neighbors and the childhood friends of his disciples, with crowds following Him but few with faith, this foreigner being an astonishing exception – at this point in His ministry, Jesus still has no doubt that many – that great multitude – will come. He knows this as God, and He knows this

as the sinless man who believes the Word of God. God promised it. They will come. God's sovereign, electing, drawing grace will not be resisted, though man's heart is depraved, for Jesus Himself will purchase them.

They will come from east and west. This is phraseology once used by the prophets to picture the restoration of Israel's exiles, and then to describe God's deliverance of the nations. From the setting of the sun to the going down of the same, the name of the Lord will be praised.

This centurion, raised outside the covenant and the law, but by grace a believer in the God of Israel, is a sign that billions will follow. They will come from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.

They will feast with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob – the patriarchs of God's chosen people. Though none of them is from Israel, they will all be a part – not merely guests, not even honored guests, but a part of Israel, members of the household of God, the covenant family, heirs of the promise, seated with prophets and righteous kings, in the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus' teaching that God would favor the Gentiles who came to Him was one of the things that most upset His detractors. From a human perspective we could say that His insistence that people from all nations would be equal to believing Jews in the kingdom was one of the things that got Him killed.

#### (6) Jesus's warning (12)

But this was even more upsetting and it is upsetting today – not only to Jews but to all those who want to consider themselves righteous based on their heritage, their background, their family, or their outward religious observance: *the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.* It will not do to make this a picture of the disappointment that people who are somehow saved while rejecting Christ – as if there were such people. This is Jesus' own language for the eternal torments of hell. There will not be an exemption for those who have some other claim besides Him, who expect God's blessing some other way besides Him. For there is no other way.

#### (7) Jesus' healing (and saving) power (13)