

**Reading:** Matthew 8:1-17

**Theme:** The Faith of the Centurion.

Imagine we, or worse, one of our children were lying in a room paralysed and yet in agony. We would break our heart if it was our child. If it was us our self it would be bad enough, just lying there, only looking at the room, being racked with pains that would shoot through our motionless body. If it was our child, as parents we would see their pain and we would want to do something, want somebody to do something to help them.

In the passage we read, we saw a Centurion's concern for a servant, but it is not the usual word for servant, but one that means "*servant or slave boy*" or "*boy*". It was a young slave or servant that was dear the Centurion so Dr Luke tells us (7:2). This means we are not to see the Centurion as a hard-nosed soldier concerned only for a piece of property, but there is a love and concern for this young slave or servant. I want us to look at the three main characters in the passage from v5-13.

### **1. The Centurion.**

Jesus' base of operations was Capernaum and so it is natural He goes back there. As He does so the Centurion approaches Him and tells Him about his servant boy (v6). We need to pause and consider this man. He was a Roman officer in charge of many men. He was probably a foreigner - non-Jew and therefore originally brought up as a pagan to believe and have other gods. He was part of the occupying army. Yet being sent to Judaea wasn't such a bad thing for him, for, as an officer, his family could easily travel with him.

Probably while he is there in Judea, he comes in contact with the Jewish faith, hears and learns of their God. As he learns, as he considers this God, he became more and more dissatisfied with his religion, his pagan beliefs. Eventually he becomes a Jew - a proselyte and transferred by elaborate rituals to the Jewish faith. He now has a belief in the Lord God of Israel. His commitment to his new faith is told us in Luke 7:5, where the Jews tell Jesus he had built a synagogue (*no doubt at great cost*) and loved the nation. This one showed his faith in practical ways and probably all his fellow officers knew he'd become a Jew and the local Jews obviously appreciated him also.

Perhaps you have been coming to church for some time now and you are beginning to realise that your religious notions are not right, do not satisfy and as you are learning of God and all He's done, you're coming to accept that you need to believe in God. That is good, but can I encourage you not to leave it there. Do not merely have a 'belief' in a God who is there somewhere and cares somehow for you. Go further, go on as did the Centurion.

The Centurion knew of God, had a belief in God, but as he got his intelligence reports in, he came across this one - Jesus of Nazareth and many amazing reports began to come in to him concerning Jesus' teachings, miracles and healings. This Centurion, as he heard such, or possibly saw such, had then thought things through and he began to realise something about this One - that He was no ordinary man, not even a great man or a prophet; he began to piece the evidence together and

he realised Jesus was surely the one the OT Scriptures spoke about and he recognised that Jesus was the Messiah and therefore God in human form. This is shown in him calling Jesus “*Lord*” - a divine title, of him feeling unworthy that such a great One should come to his house and the fact that he recognised Jesus had the authority to say “*Go*” to the disease and paralysis and “*Come*” to healing! Only God had such power and the Centurion acknowledges Jesus’ power as God.

It is quite amazing this trust and faith in Jesus developed in the Centurion. It would not have been encouraged by the Jews around him, as they, on the whole, did not believe in Jesus, yet this unbiased pagan, this one who had begun to believe in God, comes to a real and strong faith in Jesus by examining the evidence. I would encourage us all to have faith in the Lord Jesus by examining the evidence, to see who He is, what He has done and said, so that all of us here will come to a personal trust in Him as our Saviour.

It may be you feel that it’s not done in your circles of life - family, friends, work, school. It wasn’t usual for an officer, a hard-nosed Roman soldier to have faith in Jesus, but it didn’t worry him. Perhaps you feel if you did that you would be the only one to be a Christian in your family. I would encourage you to view it as being the first in your family and friends who come to know and trust the Lord Jesus as their Saviour.

The Centurion no sooner believed on Jesus than he was seeking His help for the life of another who was dear to him - he comes with his request for his servant boy. What an

amazing work God had done in this soldier. We could wonder if anything good can come from a Roman soldier, yet we see many good things - all based on his amazing faith in Jesus. He pleads for the servant boy, owns Christ's worth and his own unworthiness, owns the great power and authority of Jesus to heal by a word, even a word said at a distance.

Do we believe God in Christ can answer prayer? If so, we should be found often in prayer and seeking His help as we call on Him to work - as an individual, or in prayer meetings together. It's a great comfort that we can bring everything to God in prayer, especially for those who are near and dear to us, who we are concerned for, as well as those things that affect and concern our hearts and minds. That is something of the Centurion. Now see:

## **2. The Servant Boy.**

This boy and, as Dr Luke tells us, was close to death. He was helpless and beyond the help of any doctor around. Maybe he recalled things he'd seen and heard about Jesus, but there was no way he could go to Jesus to be healed as he may have heard the leper had been - to be touched and healed. His case was helpless and he lay there in this state, with death staring him in the face; as if death was waiting by his bedside to snatch him away.

Then suddenly, all at once and instantaneously he had no pain, no fever, he could move, sit up, move around the house! It was as if he had never been ill! It was as if someone had taken away the illness and replaced it with perfect health - with the illness, the paralysis being suddenly removed.

I wonder if the centurion had said he was going to see Jesus and all at home realised that this healing had come from Jesus? Whether or not they did, they knew it as soon as the Centurion got home and he told him, them what he'd said and how Jesus had reacted and what Jesus had said (v13).

The servant boy is a picture probably of so many of us here. When we were helpless and hopeless, when we couldn't pray for ourselves, others took our part in prayer and went to the Lord Jesus to pray for us – even doing that for us regularly now. If you are concerned about God and Christian things, then ask others to pray for you. You may be coming here and have no concern for Christian things, may be coming only for the company, but you too need to be prayed for, so that you will realise your need of Jesus as your Saviour.

For those of us who know the Lord Jesus as our Saviour, we have every encouragement to pray for other people – for their physical and spiritual needs. We are to pray for both, but we are to realise the spiritual needs are the most serious and important in the long run. That's something of the servant boy - the situation he was in and the healing he received. Now see:

### **3. The Lord Jesus Christ.**

There are many things we could say about this incident and the Lord Jesus Christ. We will not see them all, but just take notice of 3 things:

**A. Jesus' willingness to be approached by this Gentile soldier:** Jesus does not push him away, treating him as

unwanted or undesirable. Not at all, Jesus has time for him and his request. Not only that, but He is willing to go with him to his house to heal the servant. This shows to us Jesus was not an introverted nationalistic bigot, who only had time for His own nation - the Jews. No, Jesus came to save all kinds of people, from all nationalities and backgrounds. Initially His work and ministry were primarily to the Jews, but His death and saving work would be extended to all people as we see in v11.

The so great salvation the Bible teaches, is offered freely to all people. It is not restricted to religious people alone, to those who attend a particular church, or have done so for a long time. No, the free offer of salvation is open to whosoever will believe and trust the Lord Jesus irrespective of race, age, social standing, education, morals or background. All strata and people of society need to believe, to be saved and all who call on the name of the Lord Jesus **will** be saved. Note also:

**B. Jesus had no problem with the distance and the condition of the slave boy:** Whether Jesus had been many miles away or even if He was in the same or the next room, then Jesus could have healed the young servant. For some of you here, you have been brought up in a Christian home and taught the things of Jesus since a baby, have always gone to church and appear good, nice and moral – at least outwardly. On the other hand, some here may have done all sorts of things they would rather people here didn't know about! Or you may be in church for the first time in a long, long time. Your condition is no problem to the Lord Jesus as He can meet your needs and meet your greatest need even today. Your

greatest need is to be rid of your guilt and sin - this disease of sin that disfigures, that paralyzes us towards God, that prevents us from enjoying Him or His company and love.

Who you are, where you are, your background, your education and the life you have lived are no barriers to you becoming a Christian! The Lord Jesus can deal with your sin and its guilt that separates you from and paralyzes you towards God. He will welcome you as you are, but He will not leave you as you are - because He will make your life clean and make you His child. He is an amazing Saviour and He can deal with and save the most unlikely ones - He did so with me and others here - ask us to tell you how we came to trust in Jesus, for those who are Christians have things worth telling about this, so ask us and I suspect we will be glad to tell you. Finally note:

**C. The warning Jesus gave to the Jews:** these Jews had tremendous privileges - had been taught of God's care and work throughout their history, had God's word and they actually had the Lord Jesus living, teaching and doing miracles among them and yet they were not believing on Him. In v11-12 the Lord Jesus gives a solemn warning not to presume on one's background or religious upbringing as a basis for our salvation. Basically, He says in our terms *"Do not expect to be at the feast of heaven because you came to a church, because your parents or partner are Christians, for you could end up in hell even with all these privileges!"*

Many people picture Jesus as a lovey-dovey character, yet in the Bible it is He who warns of hell many times more than He

speaks of heaven. As Jesus speaks of hell, He speaks of it as a place of suffering, agony and darkness - no light of God or His goodness and love there! He has to warn the Jews, that those ones who had amazing privileges would go there in spite of all their privileges. We all need to be warned by this - that there is a way to hell from a Christian home, a Christian upbringing, religious privileges, regular church going - because we assume we are fine and neglect to make the Lord Jesus our own Saviour. Yet this morning you can believe on the Lord Jesus and be saved, have Jesus as your Saviour, know His love and care in your life and have a guaranteed home in heaven the end of your days.

The Lord Jesus is shown to be King by His power and authority - Matthew emphasises this again in v14-17 and the same principles we saw this and last week apply. Yet, even with all we see about Jesus' power to heal, we are to learn not to make, view or leave Jesus as some religious healer alone - to meet our bodily needs, as if He is some celestial Father Christmas or divine doctor figure, but realise He came to take up and carry away our disease of sin, to heal us, to rescue us from such and its consequences. I pray that we would all consider this Jesus very carefully and take time to make sure He is our own Saviour.