



“Many Shall Come from East and West”  
(Matthew 8:5-13)

Introduction: This morning, we had the privilege of hearing what the Lord is doing through one of our missionary families in Uganda. But at the same time we were also learning how the Lord has been pleased to use our giving and prayers on their behalf. Remember that missions is not the work of one family, nor simply of all those who are on the field. It is the work of the whole church. The Lord has made it so that our missionaries could not do the work He has called them to do without our support. They need our material help and spiritual help, which is to say that they need us to help finance their work and to pray for them. And this is what the Lord calls us to do. This is also the way in which we enter into the fruits of their labors. When we sacrifice some of our own time and comforts so that others can go out onto the field, then we also will share in the rewards which they will receive from the Lord on that great day, since they could not have done their work without our sacrifice. The Lord has a plan, a gracious plan, to bring all of His elect people to faith in Christ, before He is finished with this world. The only reason the world continues to stand now is that God is not yet finished bringing in all of His lost sheep. And so as long as this world endures and as long as the Lord lends us life in this world, our work is not yet finished either. We must continue to give and pray and support the work of missions as we are enabled by the Lord, until the Lord takes us home. I hope that we were all encouraged to do just that from what we heard and saw this morning.

This evening, I would like us to continue to focus our attention on the very important work of missions. Providentially, the Lord has allowed us to come to a text in the book of Matthew which is really a missionary text. It is one of the earliest indications in the Gospels that God’s plan of salvation was to be more extensive than His work among His own Covenant people of Israel. It shows us that it was also His intention from all eternity to bring the Gentiles into His kingdom. As a matter of fact, Jesus tells us that *It was God’s plan to bring far more of the Gentiles and far less of the Jews, than the Jews themselves ever suspected.* This truth, of course, not only affects our view of the work of missions as a whole, but it also very intimately involves us, for when Jesus says here that “many shall come from east and west and recline at the table with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven,” He is not talking only about the people who are out there somewhere, he is talking about us, each one of us here this evening who has entered into a living union with Christ, through faith in His name.

**I. The first thing I want us to look at this evening is this Centurion, and the many ways in which his actions pointed to the fact that he had a true and saving faith.**

A. First, I want you to notice the love that he had.

1. After Jesus came down off the mount, and after He had healed the leper, He made His way to Capernaum, which, as we have seen in the past, was the city in which Jesus lived, and in which He did many of His miracles.
  - a. This city was to receive so much light from the ministry of Christ, that shortly after this Jesus pronounced a curse upon it, because they rejected that light.
  - b. In chapter four of Matthew, we learned that after Christ’s temptation in the wilderness by the devil, and after John the Baptist had been taken into custody, He settled in Capernaum. It was here that the prophet’s words were fulfilled which said, “The people who were sitting in darkness saw a great light, and to those who were sitting in the land and shadow of death, upon them a light dawned” (v. 16). Undoubtedly, this referred to His ministry there.
  - c. But in chapter 11, we will hear Jesus say, “And you, Capernaum, will not be exalted to heaven, will you? You shall descend to Hades; for if the miracles had occurred in Sodom which occurred in you, it would have remained to this day. Nevertheless I say to you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for you” (vv. 23-24).
  - d. This reminds us again that to whom much is given, much is required. The more knowledge we have of the Lord’s will and the more certain we are that it is true, the more accountable we will be if we turn away from it to walk in our own ways.
  - e. But these miracles not only rendered some more guilty because of their rejection of them,

they also served to bring others to Christ. This is what they did in the case of the Centurion. We read that when Jesus had entered Capernaum, a Centurion came to Him. He had heard about Jesus and had sought Him out.

2. But let's stop here and consider a few things about this man.
  - a. He was a Centurion, a Roman military officer who had 100 men under his charge. This means that he had authority, not only over his men, but also over his servants, which, as a man of influence, he would have had several of. But being a Roman, he was also a *Gentile*, a fact which Jesus will make much of a little later in our passage.
  - b. But think about the most important thing we read about this Gentile: he had faith in Christ. Why else would he have sought Jesus out, if he didn't believe that Jesus was a man sent from God? It wouldn't be a virtue, but a crime, to seek out a man who was a deceiver, even if he could heal. But Jesus was no deceiver. Certainly the Centurion didn't think so. Otherwise, he would not have been there seeking His help, and as we will see, have such a willingness to take Jesus at His Word.
  - c. But notice the first striking thing about this Centurion's faith: it was a loving and caring faith. What was it that brought him to Jesus? It was not his own needs, but those of another, those of his servant. When he came to Jesus, he said, "Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, suffering great pain." The word he uses for "servant," is not that used of a common slave, but that of a son. This Centurion apparently had a great love for his servant. Luke says that he "was highly regarded by him" (7:2). And the fact that this one he cared for was in great pain, prompted him to seek out someone who could help him. And he knew that the only one who could do this was Jesus.
  - d. We should consider here that it is not wrong for us to be concerned about the physical well-being of others, especially those we love. We could even say that it is a genuine act of true piety, even though the physical well-being of others is far less important than their spiritual well-being, to be concerned for someone's health. An unsympathetic heart is a hard heart. What would we think of the apostle Paul if he had had no concern for the suffering of his friend Epaphroditus, especially when he was suffering because of his ministry to Paul in prison (Phil. 2)? Even though the suffering of the centurion's servant was not brought about by a sacrifice this noble, yet it was still important to the centurion. If we are not moved by the suffering of those around us, if we do not do what we can to relieve their suffering, then how can we say that we truly care about them? Notice too that Jesus did not rebuke the centurion for his concern. He was even prompted by His own compassion to go and help the man. Neither is it wrong for us to be concerned about the physical welfare of others, as long as we do not neglect the far more important matter of their spiritual welfare.
  - e. Another way in which we see his love demonstrated is in what it moved him to do for the Jews. In the parallel passage in Luke, the Jews say to Jesus about this Centurion, "He is worthy for You to grant this to him; for he loves our nation, and it was he who built us our synagogue" (7:4-5). Why did this Centurion, this Gentile, build a synagogue for the very people who resented and resisted the Roman government more than just about any other people? It could only have been that he recognized the fact that salvation was from the Jews. They had the truth. To them had been entrusted the oracles of God (Rom. 3:2). They had the true worship of God. And so this man did what he could to help them promote the true religion. This shows us that this man was probably what is called a God-fearer. He had embraced the Jewish religion, he trusted in the Messiah pictured in their ceremonies, he lived the life that the Lord required of him, but had not become a full proselyte by receiving circumcision.
  - f. There is much we can learn from this man's love. Faith is that which works by love. It causes one to go out of his way to help those who are in need. We must examine our own lives to see whether or not we have this same kind of love, to see whether or not we are also becoming servants to one another, using what we have at our disposal to help one another. This is the foremost fruit of the Spirit. And it is that which Paul says will continue forever, even after our faith has finally become sight (1 Cor. 13:13).

- B. But there is more we can see in this man's faith. His faith was also active.
1. True love is never just an emotion which is felt, it is a driving force which motivates a man to minister to the object of his love.
  2. Notice that this Centurion did not love in word only, but also in deed (1 John 3:18).
    - a. We have already seen how his love for his servant moved him to seek out Jesus.
    - b. And we have seen how this same love moved him to use whatever financial resources he had to build a place of worship for the Jews. It is quite possible that this synagogue he built was the very one which Jesus preached in again and again when He was in Capernaum (John 6:59; Mark 1:21; Luke 4:33). If so, then this Centurion's work of love also became an instrument in the proclamation of the Gospel in that city among the Jews.
    - c. Love really isn't love until it is given away. It isn't love until it is exercised on behalf of another. What good would God's love have done us, if it hadn't been strong enough to move Him to send His Son into the world to save us? There may have been compassion towards us in heaven, but we would still have sunk down into hell. What good is secret love, when it does no visible good to anyone?
    - d. Let this be an encouragement to us to put our love into action. Let's not just profess to one another by our words that we love our brethren, our friends, and our enemies, but let's show it by our deeds of love.
- C. Thirdly, we see that this Centurion had a humble faith.
1. He recognized that he was not worthy to ask anything from Jesus.
    - a. When Jesus told him that He would come and heal his servant, the man replied, "Lord, I am not worthy for You to come under my roof" (v. 8). It wasn't that the man was embarrassed by the condition of his home as it often is with us, for this man must have had a very nice home. But it was because he recognized the condition of his heart. Remember Peter's words, when Jesus performed the miracle of the great catch of fish, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord" (Luke 5:8)!
    - b. Not only did this man consider himself too unworthy to entertain so holy a guest, but because of his humility, he would not even approach Jesus himself. We learn in Luke that the Centurion did not come to Jesus personally, but sent first some Jewish elders and then some friends to appear before Jesus on his behalf. Matthew records the event as though the Centurion himself came, but this is not the case. It is common in the Bible to speak of one person doing something, when it is plain that it was done by someone else. When we read that Solomon offered a thousand burnt offerings in Gibeon, the writer did not mean that Solomon himself did it, but that he had it done through the agency of the priests (1 Kings 3:4). The Centurion sent his friends to say to Jesus, after Jesus had already started off for the Centurion's house, "Lord, do not trouble Yourself further, for I am not worthy for You to come under my roof; for this reason I did not even consider myself worthy to come to You" (7:6-7).
    - c. The church today has much to learn about true humility. We have come to think that God exists for us, rather than we for God. We have somehow reached the conclusion that God ought to be the One always ministering to us, rather than that we should minister to God. And how offended we are if we don't get what we want from Him, and from those who serve in His name. This Centurion, like the tax-gatherer who prayed next to the Pharisee, was too humble to demand anything, but realizing that he didn't deserve anything but damnation, was thankful for whatever the Lord would graciously give him. He didn't want to bother Jesus or make Him stoop to help him any further than was really necessary to meet his urgent need on behalf of another. May the Lord also teach us how insignificant we and our needs are compared to our need to give God glory. The Lord has made it so that we will not find our fulfillment or joy in seeking after our own things. Jesus says that he who finds his own life shall lose it (Matt. 16:25a). But the one who sets aside his own needs and his own life to become a servant to others, shall find it (Matt. 16:25b). The Centurion's desire for his servant was fulfilled. But it was only because he was willing to humble himself and become a servant on his behalf before God. Let us learn from this to live for Christ and for others, for this is how we shall find our true joy.

- D. Lastly, the Centurion had a believing faith. In other words, he did not just say he believed, he really did believe.
1. So strong was his faith that Jesus had the authority from God to heal his servant, that he didn't even believe it necessary for Jesus to come to his house. He said to Jesus, "Just say the word, and my servant will be healed" (v. 8). He recognized that Jesus had authority over sickness and disease, just as he had authority over men. And in the same way that his soldiers and servants obeyed him, the sickness of his servant had to obey Jesus!
  2. The essence of faith, the author to the Hebrews tells us, is "the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1). This man had only heard about Jesus. He had not even seen what He could do. But so strong was his faith, that he believed that whatever Jesus said *would come to pass, even if Jesus was not there to do it personally*. And he was right. All Jesus had to do was to speak the word, and his servant was healed.
    - a. What does this teach us about how we should trust what the Lord has told us?
    - b. He has spoken to us as plainly and as clearly as He did to the Centurion, in His Word. He has given to us many gracious and wonderful promises. We have seen His faithfulness. We know that He is true to His Word. And so why should we ever doubt Him?
    - c. Let us doubt Him no longer, but begin to walk by the light of His truth. Let us live by every Word which comes from His mouth (Matt. 4:4). And let us trust Him for His gracious provisions which He daily supplies us (6:33).

**II. But now enough about the Centurion's faith. More to our purpose tonight, let us look now at Jesus' response.**

- A. This faith the Centurion had was so unlike anything Jesus had seen that it caused Him to marvel.
1. He marveled first because this Centurion believed that He was able to do this miracle without even being where his servant was. He marveled because this man really believed that He had authority over the unseen world of sickness. And if the Centurion would attribute this to Jesus, what would he not believe Him capable of?
  2. But Jesus also marveled because He had not seen anything like this man's faith even among His own people. He said to those who were following Him, "Truly I say to you, I have not found such great faith with anyone *in Israel*" (v. 11). Surely, if so great a faith was to be found anywhere, it would have been in a son of the Covenant! But this was not the case. This Gentile outstripped them all!
- B. And this brings us to the missionary statement of Jesus, "And I say to you, that many shall come from east and west, and recline at the table with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven; but the sons of the kingdom shall be cast out into the outer darkness; in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (vv. 11-12). Now quickly, what does He mean by this?
1. The sons of the kingdom are obviously the Jews.
    - a. They were those who were to inherit the kingdom. God had owned them as His people and promised to give them the kingdom by placing His mark of circumcision upon them. But there was a condition. If they were to inherit the promises of God, there was a circumcision which God expected them to perform upon their own hearts.
    - b. But they didn't. They remained hard-hearted, stiff-necked and rebellious. They would not love God, listen to His Word or submit to His will. They even rejected His Messiah, His own Son, when He came to them.
    - c. And so the Lord was turning them out of His kingdom. He was casting them away. This meant that their future was dim. If they had received Christ, they would have obtained heaven. But through their rejection of Him, they were to receive hell, that place of all torment, where the suffering is so great that all that can be heard is bitter crying and the grinding of teeth. He was casting them out into the place where there is nothing of the light of God's comfortable presence, only the uttermost darkness.
    - d. Now this is not to say that all of the Jews are lost. In every age God has His remnant according to His gracious election. But the vast majority of them have been lost, because they have refused to receive the only One who can save them.

2. But since this was the case, what did the Lord intend to do? The sons of the kingdom were not worthy, so now He was turning to the Gentiles.
  - a. In the parable of the wedding banquet, when those who were invited refused to come, the Lord sent His armies out to destroy them, but He sent His servants out into the highways and the byways to compelled all whom they might find to come in (Matt. 22). When the Jews rejected Christ, God sent the Roman army to bring judgment upon them, but Christ's disciples out into the world to invite all they could find, all who were willing from among the Gentiles, to come and recline at His table at the Wedding Supper of the Lamb.
  - b. Jesus said that "many shall come from east and west, and recline at the table with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven" (v. 11). Paul tells us that He has turned to the Gentiles to make Israel jealous, so that they will repent and turn back to Him and claim that which is rightfully theirs (Rom. 11:11). There is no other plan for the Jews besides this. They must come to God through Jesus Christ. They must become a part of His church, or they will perish forever.
  - c. In our text we see Jesus using the faith of this Gentile to do this very thing. Perhaps He said this in the hearing of those Jews who were following Him because, although He knew that the majority of the Jews would later reject Him, yet He knew that there was a remnant according to God's gracious election who would not. Perhaps He was even then provoking some of them to jealousy that they might come to Him.
  - d. But certainly we see here that Gentile salvation and the whole work of missions is being predicted by Jesus. There are those who are in the east who must be gathered, and those in the west. Christ's sheep are in every corner of the world, among every people group on earth. And it is the church's responsibility to go and gather them in. It is our responsibility.
  - e. Let us therefore set our hearts to do this work. Let us pray that the Lord would raise up a great army in our time to accomplish this task. Let us pray that the Lord of the harvest would send laborers into His fields. The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few (Matt. 9:37). But let us not only pray that the Lord would use others, but also that He would use us. We are His church. We are those to whom this work during this age has been committed. Let us therefore put on a loving, active, humble and believing faith, and put our hands to the plow. And let us pray that the Lord would work this same kind of faith in the hearts of all His elect people whom He would gather from all the nations, and from our own city and families. This is what our Lord calls us to tonight. May He now by His grace and mercy give us the heart and the strength to do it. Amen.