

Under Authority

Matthew Chapter 8

Federal law requires everyone who enlists or re-enlists to take the enlistment oath. It is usually administered by a commissioned officer who reads the oath and the person being sworn in repeats it. It is fairly straight forward, “I, (NAME), do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; and that I will obey the orders of the President of the United States and the orders of the officers appointed over me, according to regulations and the Uniform Code of Military Justice. So help me God.” In the time of Christ, every Roman soldier also pledged their allegiance by reciting the *sacramentum* upon their enlistment, repeated it annually on January 3rd and on the anniversary of the current emperor’s reign: ““Step forward, recruit [“Comodus Arilius Maximus”], and swear by the gods of Rome, the manes of your ancestors, and your own honor an unbreakable oath that you will follow your commander wherever he may lead you. You will obey orders enthusiastically and without question. You relinquish the protection of the Roman civil law and accept the power of your commander to put you to death without trial for disobedience or desertion. You promise to serve under the standards for your allotted time of duty and not to leave before your commander discharges you. You will serve Rome faithfully, even at the cost of your life, and will respect the law with regards to civilians and your comrades in camp. Congratulations. You are now a soldier of Rome!” They also took an oath to defend each other, the *ius iurandum*: ““I swear that I will not leave my comrades for fear or for flight, and will not quit the ranks save to fetch or pick up a weapon, to strike an enemy, or to save a comrade!” The soldier, after several years of faithful and valiant service may ascend the rank of Centurion. Such men were expected to be courageous on the battlefield and lead his men by example.

One such soldier came to Jesus after He entered Capernaum, “entreating Him, and saying, ‘Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, suffering great pain.’” Jesus responds, “I will come and heal him.” As we read this exchange, we would expect the centurion to be grateful and excited. We would probably have expected the centurion to say, “awesome, lets go” or “let’s go, there’s no time to waste” or “let’s hurry”. But the centurion responds in a very unexpected way by saying, “Lord, I am not worthy for You to come under my roof, but just say the word, and my servant will be healed. “For I also am a man under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to this one, ‘Go!’ and he goes, and to another, ‘Come!’ and he comes, and to my slave, ‘Do this!’ and he does it.” There are a few things that catch our attention. Jesus was willing to go to his house to take care of his servant. As chapter eight starts, Jesus touched and heals a leper. In that day, no one touched a leper and now Jesus is willing to go into the house of a gentile, but not only a gentile a Roman, but not only a Roman but a centurion. The centurion calls Jesus, “Lord” twice showing not only courtesy but also the belief, faith and conviction that Jesus possessed both the position and the power to fulfill his request and heal his servant. His reluctance to have Jesus “come under his roof” shows not only modesty and humility but an awareness of Jesus’ holiness and his unworthiness. The centurion understands authority, standards of conduct, the power of his orders and recognizes the power, authority of Jesus. He believes that all Jesus needs to do is “just say the word, and my servant will be healed”. “When Jesus heard this, He marveled.” The Greek verb “thaumazo, (τηνυμαζο) which means “to wonder at” or “to marvel” is used frequently in the presentation of Jesus miracles but is only used two times in the New Testament with respect to Jesus. His astonishment is expressed in two statements; First, ““Now when Jesus heard this, He marveled and said to those who were following, “Truly I say to you, I have not found such great faith with anyone in Israel.” No one had shown this depth of faith “in Israel”. Second, Jesus then makes an incredible statement, “I say to you that many will come from east and west, and recline at the table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven; but the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” In other words, the promises and privileges given to Abraham and his descendants were not derived from being the off spring of his physical body but the spiritual offspring of his belief and faith in God. Jesus provided a glimpse of what would happen after His ascension into heaven. Many Gentiles will be in the kingdom of heaven while many privileged people of promise will be cast into outer darkness.

The centurion request was answered, “as you believed”. Does our faith reflect this level of conviction?

1. What happened when Jesus finished teaching? Who approached Jesus? How were lepers treated in the time of Christ? What was his request and how did Jesus respond? What did Jesus tell him to do? What offerings would he need to provide based on Moses' instruction? Do you think God heals today?

2. Who came to Jesus in verses 5-13? What do we know of him because of his position? What was his request? What did Jesus offer to do and what was the response? Why was Jesus astonished and what did Jesus do?

3. What happened upon Jesus' arrival at Peter's house and when did this occur (see Mark 1:29-31)? What happened in the evening, what was Jesus doing and why was he doing it?

4. When Jesus saw the crowd, what did he do and why did he do it? What did the scribe want and what was Jesus' response? What is the meaning of verses 21-22? What happens in verses 23-27? How did the disciples react and how were their reactions before and after the event?

5. What happened when they arrived on the other side of the lake (28-34)? How does scripture describe the two men? What did they cry out, what was their request and what does this tell us about demons? How did the pig herders react? What mattered to the people of the city.