

Focus Text

“When he had entered Capernaum, a centurion came forward to him, appealing to him, “Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, suffering terribly.” And he said to him, “I will come and heal him.” But the centurion replied, “Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof, but only say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I too am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. And I say to one, ‘Go,’ and he goes, and to another, ‘Come,’ and he comes, and to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and he does it.” When Jesus heard this, he marveled and said to those who followed him, “Truly, I tell you, with no one in Israel have I found such faith. I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” And to the centurion Jesus said, “Go; let it be done for you as you have believed.” And the servant was healed at that very moment. And when Jesus entered Peter’s house, he saw his mother-in-law lying sick with a fever. He touched her hand, and the fever left her, and she rose and began to serve him. That evening they brought to him many who were oppressed by demons, and he cast out the spirits with a word and healed all who were sick. This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah: “He took our illnesses and bore our diseases.” **(Matthew 8:5–17, ESV)**

1. Centurion's Unyielding Confidence

“When he had entered Capernaum, a centurion came forward to him, appealing to him, “Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, suffering terribly.” And he said to him, “I will come and heal him.” But the centurion replied, “Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof, but only say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I too am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. And I say to one, ‘Go,’ and he goes, and to another, ‘Come,’ and he comes, and to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and he does it.” When Jesus heard this, he marveled and said to those who followed him, “Truly, I tell you, with no one in Israel have I found such faith.”

(Matthew 8:5–10, ESV)

Jesus is heading to his home in Capernaum, the largest village in the vicinity of Galilee. Another miracle story begins. A centurion, a Roman Commander of 100 soldiers, approaches Jesus about a paralyzed servant/slave. The Centurion was a compassionate man. Who, like King Artaxerxes, took pity on Nehemiah, his slave cupbearer, wanted to help this servant. The Roman desires Jesus to heal this servant. However, the ethnic hatred of Romans and Jews was real, and this soldier, not wanting to cause trouble for Jesus, displays a level of trust in Jesus that hasn’t been seen since John the Baptist. The soldier calls Jesus “Lord” and compares their authority; a common term is “Like recognizes Like.” This man sees a king with spiritual power and authority and asks, almost in quiet tones, that Jesus exercise His authority to heal this servant without approaching his home. The tone that Matthew is setting is one of secrecy and shame. There is no way a Jewish rabbi would enter the house of a Roman commander. So the Roman quietly asks that Jesus simply say the words.

Jesus’ response isn’t quite; it’s loud and brash. He marveled, meaning he stood awestruck, and then turned to those who were following and revealed to the whole crowd that this Roman soldier had more faith in God than anyone in all of Israel. The people would have been insulted and enraged at this comment. Romans were polytheists who denied their God; how could this Roman be more faithful than anyone in Israel? Jesus is making a powerful point that belief is rooted in trust. Faith and trust are synonymous realities. This Roman understands Jesus’ spiritual authority and, in humility, asks the Lord to use that authority to have compassion on a slave in his house. That unwavering trust in what Jesus can do, and the God Jesus represents, brings a new light to the trust and faith of this Roman. Also, it displays the lack of faith in Israel. Matthew brings two points to bear in this story, which we will examine next.

“No one else, however, would have anticipated the centurion’s response. These verses disclose an astonishing attitude for an authoritative commander of military forces. The man repeats the title “Lord.” He admits his unworthiness (“I do not deserve”), using a statement identical in the Greek to that used by John the Baptist in 3:11 (“I am not fit”). He emphatically positions the word “my” in the Greek sentence to emphasize his subordination. He recognizes the barriers of ritual uncleanness that would have prevented a Jew from entering his home, and he amazingly believes in Jesus’ ability to cure his servant from a distance merely by a word of command. Such healing was virtually unprecedented in ancient Judaism, and Matthew has not prepared his readers to expect it. But the centurion bases his belief on his own experience with the military. Just as he can command others to carry out the orders he himself has been given and can expect their instant and complete obedience, so also he believes that Jesus, under God’s authority, gives orders for illnesses to be cured instantaneously. “Authority” is obviously the key term again in these verses.”¹

2. Kingdom's Expansive Embrace

“I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” And to the centurion Jesus said, “Go; let it be done for you as you have believed.” And the servant was healed at that very moment.” **(Matthew 8:11–13, ESV)**

Jesus moves this quiet request into a foretaste of the Kingdom of God and a sober warning to the Jews who seem to believe that, despite their sinfulness and lack of trust, they are rightful heirs of God’s Kingdom. Jesus shows us that many Gentiles from all over the world will come in faith to trust in Jesus, and in doing so, they will trust in the Triune God. They will be at the Heavenly banquet. Eating with the great patriarchs of the faith. However, those in Israel with no faith in Christ or in God will be cast out into darkness. Jesus is inferring that there is a hellish place of judgement where those who reject God through rejecting the Messiah will be cast out.

¹ Blomberg, Craig. 1992. Matthew. Vol. 22. The New American Commentary. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

Jesus then uses His authority to heal the servant without taking one single step. Matthew records yet again the instantaneous healing that occurs to the servant. The Centurion was correct; Jesus does command spiritual authority, and his servant is healed. Matthew is painting a picture here in which Jesus is the King of the Kingdom, and anyone who is humble and submits to His rule and reign will experience supernatural kindness, regardless of their ethnicity or bias. Conversely, those who oppose the King and refuse to submit to His reign and rule will be cast away from His Kingdom regardless of their supposed inheritance. Our final story will show us once more what it will be like to serve under King Jesus.

“Matthew has experienced both Israel’s no to Jesus and the destruction of Jerusalem. He has seen many Gentiles turning to Jesus, and he challenges his own church to become involved in the gentile mission. The threatening word is for him also a prediction that exactly describes his own situation. The Gentiles from east and west will turn to the God of Israel. They will recline at the table with the patriarchs of Israel in the kingdom of God. The sons of the kingdom, however, will lose the “Kingdom” (cf. 21:43*).²⁶ Darkness is their fate.²⁷ “Outer” expresses figuratively the exclusion from the banquet hall (cf. 22:13*) and literally the infinite distance from the kingdom of God. “Weeping and gnashing of teeth” is the expression of horrible pain.²⁸ Matthew imagines the terror of hell to be very real, even if he does not elaborate on it conceptually.”²

² * 43 Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom. Matthew 21:43 (NRSV)

²⁶ The church’s interpretation of this verse has been surprisingly reserved, with the main interest by and large on vv. 7–9*. One finds frequent references to Romans 11 such as that, e.g., by Musculus (196), who says that not all Jews are rejected.

²⁷ “Darkness” is a frequent attribute of Sheol and of Gehenna. Cf. Str-B 4.1076–78; Gnllka, 1. 304.

* 13 Then the king said to the attendants, ‘Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ Matthew 22:13 (NRSV)

²⁸ We conclude this for κλαυθμός on the basis of 13:42*, 50* (fire); 24:51* (cutting the servant into pieces); 1 Enoch 108.3, 5 (crying/screaming from pain); 2 Enoch 40.12 (weeping/complaining). One can gnash one’s teeth on different occasions, but in the context it is to be interpreted as with κλαυθμός. Thus there is no need to think of hell’s coldness (teeth chattering as when one shivers), of the rage of the condemned when they see the redeemed (cf. Luke 13:25–28*; 4 Ezra 7.83*; Midr. Qoh. 1.15 = Str-B 4.1040), or of the “despairing remorse” of the condemned (Karl Heinrich Rengstorf, “βούχω κτλ,” TDNT 1 [1964] 642).

Luz, Ulrich. 2001. Matthew: A Commentary. Edited by Helmut Koester. Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg.

3. Jesus's Compassionate Command

“And when Jesus entered Peter’s house, he saw his mother-in-law lying sick with a fever. He touched her hand, and the fever left her, and she rose and began to serve him. That evening they brought to him many who were oppressed by demons, and he cast out the spirits with a word and healed all who were sick. This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah: “He took our illnesses and bore our diseases.” **(Matthew 8:14–17, ESV)**

Finally, Jesus arrives home to Capernaum and finds Peter’s mother-in-law sick and ill. Indicating Peter was indeed married. He touched her, once again breaking from tradition, and she was healed in an instant, a testament to Jesus’ authority. Her service to Jesus would have been customary in ancient times, reflecting the hospitality of the era. Matthew is creating a visual image of her recovery; she is up and serving her honored guest because she is completely healed. After dinner in the evening, the entire town was brought before Jesus to be healed. The demonic and the ill were taken to be healed. Matthew compares this to Isaiah’s picture of the suffering servant in chapter 53. Here, Matthew illustrates how the Messiah would bear the sickness of His people and make them whole. The image here does not yet point toward the cross; instead, a better focus is on Jesus’ authority as the King of the Kingdom of God. He can bring wholeness wherever He goes. As we reflect on these passages, two theological realities come to mind. First, being Kingdom citizens opens the believer up to the supernatural realm, and God still chooses to heal people in miraculous ways today because Jesus brought the Kingdom of God in part. Secondly, healing today will not have the same level of instant power that we see in Matthew, nor the same frequency, because while we represent Jesus, we are not the King. However, the primary focus of the healings for Matthew’s audience is to instill faith that Jesus is indeed God’s Messiah. Jesus has and will continue to make authoritative claims about who He is, and His spiritual power is the tangible proof of His Kingship. God still blesses and heals His children, but it has never happened on the scale that we saw when Jesus walked the earth in the flesh. Even in the New Testament, after Christ, we see healings, but nothing compared to Christ!

Application

“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.” **(2 Timothy 3:16–17, ESV)**

Do you and I approach God’s word in humility and trust? The Roman Centurion came to Jesus with a faith/trust that Jesus is a King with unmatched spiritual authority. Jesus marveled at this man’s faith in Him.

This week, as you read God’s word, will you take some action? No matter what, if the Lord is calling out a change in you, then be willing to change! Amen!