

## **The Faith of the Centurion and The Feast of the Lamb**

### **Matthew 8:5-13**

Good morning Coram Deo. It's great to be with you this morning. I want to extend my gratitude to Pastor Rob for allowing me to preach here one last time in his absence. As many of you have heard, my wife and I will be moving to Tipton, Indiana where I have accepted the call to be the Senior Pastor of Rock Prairie Baptist Church.

I want you to know that we love you very much. Emily and I are so thankful for the 2 ½ years that the Lord has blessed us with to be able to serve here. You guys have loved us so well, and we will miss you very much.

Many of you have seen (or tripped over) our son Owen, who turned two a couple months ago, but what you may not know is that he is adopted. The day after he was born, we got a phone call from our adoption agency telling us that there was a baby born and if we wanted to adopt him we needed to get to Oklahoma that day. So we dropped everything and went. We were there for 2 weeks and when we got back, our house had been cleaned, our fridge had been filled, and our guest bedroom had been filled to the brim with baby supplies. We were overwhelmed by how supportive you guys were, and that's just one example of many times we felt so loved here. So let me charge you to keep on loving the Lord, keep on loving one another, and keep on following after Christ. We will miss you guys so much. And know that we will continue to pray for you often.

But enough about me, because even though this is the last time I will be able to preach here as your Outreach Pastor, the only thing that can transform us to be more like Christ is the Holy Spirit working through the Word of God, amen? So turn with me to Matthew 8:5-13, which is our passage for this morning. And as you're turning there, let me pray.

*Father, thank you for your Word. Thank you for this opportunity we have to open it together and apply it to our lives. I pray that you would guard my heart and my tongue, and allow me to be your vessel as I preach your Word. We pray that you would fill this place with your Spirit and be glorified in our time today. Amen.*

Now, I'm not a movie buff, but I'm told that this time of year, around Christmas and New Year's is the best time of year for new movies coming out. And one thing nowadays that you can count on is that there will be some sort of superhero movie that people can't wait to see.

But I need to make a confession. Can I do that this morning? I need to confess that I don't like them. In fact, I think they're kind of boring. Because you always know what's going to happen! It's always some variation on the good guy will fight the bad guy, an entire city will get destroyed, and the good guy will win.

Maybe that's not true of all superhero movies, but I love a movie with a twist ending. In my opinion, the best movies are the ones that have an ending that no one could expect. Maybe I'm weird, but I love to be blindsided in a theater by something completely out of left field.

And this passage is a classic example of Jesus doing and saying something totally unexpected. It's something that no one saw coming. Completely out of left field. And it's something that would set the course of redemptive history, forever. How's that for a teaser?

So look at Matthew 8 and as I read it, see if you can find the twist. Starting in verse 5:

*When he had entered Capernaum, a centurion came forward to him, appealing to him, 6 "Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, suffering terribly." 7 And he said to him, "I will come and heal him." 8 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. 9 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." 10 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. 11 I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, 12 while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." 13 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.*

Before we get into the meat of the passage, we need to notice where we're picking up the story in Matthew. When we read the gospels, it can be easy to just think of them as a series of randomly arranged stories just telling about Jesus' life. But the truth is, and this is especially true in Matthew, the events are carefully arranged to get a point across. One thing that's amazing about the Bible is that because it's inspired, we can learn from both the words of scripture *and* their placement in the overall story. So what's happening here?

The events in the first 3 chapters in Matthew are all arranged to show us that this man named Jesus is in fact the long awaited Messiah. The genealogy (the long list of names in chapter 1), the story about his birth, and the account of John the Baptist all show us that this man is the one we've been waiting for—the one prophesied thousands of years ago. Then, the temptation of Christ in chapter 4 shows that the Messiah will be the one who triumphs over evil. And then, in chapters 5-7, The Sermon on the Mount shows that Jesus' teaching is unlike any other teaching in the history of mankind.

So we have the authority in his *position* as Messiah at birth, his authority over *the evil one* in the temptation, his authority in *teaching* in the Sermon on the Mount, and now we enter a section that shows his Kingdom authority. Are you starting to see a pattern?

We see this Kingdom authority, his authority in the kingdom of God, in the three healing accounts of chapter 8. Jesus heals three unexpected people: a leper, who was marginalized due to sickness, a slave—marginalized due to position, and a woman—marginalized due to gender.

So the first 8 chapters of Matthew can be summed up like this: Jesus has absolute authority. He is the rightful king.

Our passage this morning is the second of the 3 healing stories—and in it we see four surprising things in the conversation between Jesus and the Centurion. It's like a "tennis match of surprises". Have you ever seen a point in a tennis match where each shot was more unbelievable than the last? It's like that. The centurion says one surprising thing, then Jesus' response is baffling, then the centurion says something stunning, and then Jesus just slams it home with an overhead smash, which is the twist we talked about earlier. And after we observe the 'tennis match', we'll look at two things we need to do in response.

4 surprises, 2 responses, all making one point, and here it is: The **Feast** of God is determined by **Faith**, not **Family**. God's invitation to the **Feast** is based on **Faith**, not **Family**.

So let's jump in to the tennis match, starting in verse 5:

*When he had entered Capernaum, a centurion came forward to him, appealing to him, 6 "Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, suffering terribly."*

**Surprise #1:** The serve. It is shocking that a Centurion would approach Jesus. Not only was he a Gentile approaching a Jewish teacher, but he was part of the Roman military that was actually oppressing the people of God. Orthodox Jews would have despised the Centurion because he represented the oppressors of Israel. But the Centurion approaches Jesus with incredible respect, calling him Lord.

And not only was it shocking that he would approach Jesus, but that he would do it on behalf of his *servant*.

In the Greco-Roman world, the average slave owner had no more regard for his slave than for an animal. So for the Centurion to shame himself by approaching Jesus, and then to do so on behalf of his *servant* was unthinkable.

**Surprise #2** is Jesus' response in verse 7. He says: "I will come and heal him." Other translations render it as a question, "Shall I come and heal him?" But the meaning is the same: Jesus is offering to go to this man's house to heal the servant.

To our ears this sounds like no big deal. This is what Jesus does. Right? Jesus heals people, so it makes sense for him offer to go heal him. But to the original audience, this was a scandalous thing for Jesus to say.

Because if Jesus enters this Centurion's home, the home of a Gentile, meaning a non-Jew, he would become ceremonially unclean. Jews didn't go into Gentile homes for that very reason. For Jesus to offer to enter his home was not only shocking to the first century reader, it was shocking to the Centurion! And we know that because of his reply, which is **surprise #3**.

Verse 8: **8** 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. **9** 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."

A centurion was someone with 100 men under his direct orders. The Centurion knew what it was like to have authority. When he spoke a word, it was as good as done. Why? Because he spoke with the authority of the emperor. When the Centurion spoke, it carried same weight as if the emperor was speaking. And he—a gentile—is acknowledging that Jesus has that *same kind* of authority over creation. Why? Because he speaks with the authority of God.

So catch this—he's acknowledging that Jesus has complete authority over sickness. When he says "Say the word and my servant will be healed," he's saying, "I know You can speak a word, and creation will obey you."

"When I tell my men to go, they go. When I tell my men to stay, they stay. You can do that, Jesus. Tell the sickness to go. It will go. Because you speak with the authority of the living God. Speak the word, Jesus.

And it's not like the Centurion had seen or heard of Jesus doing this before. As far as we know, this was the first time that Jesus had ever healed someone from afar. But the Centurion believed that Jesus had authority.

This is Breathtaking faith. Breathtaking from a Gentile. Breathtaking from a Centurion. Breathtaking from a slave-owner. He got it. He knew what this Jesus was all about.

He got it, and Jesus recognized it. Jesus' recognition of his faith is **Surprise #4**, and, like we said before, it's the overhead smash. We've finally made it to the twist ending.

Read starting in verse 10: **10** When Jesus heard this, he marveled

Why did he marvel? Because of his faith. Gentiles were not supposed to have this kind of faith. and said to those who followed him,

Notice, he doesn't respond to the Centurion right away, but instead he addresses the people around him. Look at what he says:

“Truly, I tell you, with no one in Israel have I found such faith. **11** I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, **12** while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

Don't miss what's happening here. Jesus, the Jewish Messiah, the one who is the rightful heir from the line of Abraham and David, the long awaited king who is going to restore Israel to its rightful place is *redefining the people of God*. It's not just Israel anymore. It's everyone. It's not just family. It's faith.

Jews were proud of their heritage because they were the chosen people of the one true God. They were the ones who were supposed to be God's favored people. They were the ones who were supposed to be restored to a political power. And the Pharisees were meticulously living their lives so that they wouldn't break even the smallest of God's commandments. And yet, here's Jesus saying that he hasn't seen faith like this in all of Israel!

This is a *radical* redefinition of the people of God. When he says, “Many will come from east and west,” he's talking about non-Jews. People outside of God's chosen family. It's all peoples. Every nation will be invited to participate with the heroes of the faith! And not only that, but many people *inside* the chosen family will be banished!

Are you kidding me? This is like saying that Brett Favre is invited to the Chicago Bears hall of fame! While Walter Peyton would be banished to Lambeau Field. It's unthinkable!

How can Jesus say this? Because your invitation to the feast is based on faith, not family. “Truly, I tell you, with no one in Israel have I found such faith.” It's about faith. Not having the right lineage, not having the right credentials, not having the right background. Faith alone.

As you can imagine, this enraged the Jewish leaders. To them, this man who was claiming to be their Messiah was turning his back on his people. The man who was supposed to restore Israel to its rightful place on top was instead redefining the people of God. A travesty in their eyes.

And yet, they should have seen it coming. If they weren't so blind, they would have seen it. Because this message-that the kingdom of God is a kingdom for all peoples-is *all over* the Old Testament. And the idea of the nations reclining at a feast is specifically in Isaiah 25:6.

It says, “On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine.” (Did you catch that?)...and he will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations...

Why a feast? What does it mean that the nations will recline at a feast? Jesus picks up on this idea of a feast again in Matthew 22, in the parable of the wedding feast. In it, a king prepares a great feast for his son's wedding. But when he invites his guests, they pay no attention. So he

says to his servants in verse 8, “The wedding feast is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy. Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you can find.”

So in our passage, when Jesus says many from east and west will recline at table with the Jewish Patriarchs, he’s saying that the Kingdom of God is open to all people.

The great mystery of the Gospel, is that it is for all peoples. All nations.

What sounded like treason to the Jewish people was actually God’s plan from the beginning. It was always about faith. All the way back in Genesis 15, God says that Abraham’s descendants would be a blessing to *all nations*.

And in Revelation 19:9 we see the beautiful completion, “Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the lamb” “Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the lamb.”

The invitation to the **Feast** of God is determined by **Faith**, not **Family**. “Nowhere in Israel have I found such faith.” It’s about faith.

What does this mean for us? Two things.

First, **Get on your knees**.

Get on your knees and ask the Lord to give you faith like the Centurion. The man who trusted God’s power over creation so much that he knew he could heal with a word. Ask yourself: Do I have faith like that? Do you? Do you live like you believe it? Do you trust his authority to rule over your life? Our God who created with a word can speak a Word, and creation will obey him. Are you giving him that authority in your life?

Pastor Rob last week said, “When God says Go, you Go.” No questions asked. Are you obedient? Why not? When he speaks, creation obeys. When he speaks, you obey.

And do you trust that it is only Christ’s work on your behalf that could ever save you in the first place? That no amount of times going to church, no growing up in a Christian family, no money given to the poor, no amount of volunteer hours could ever reconcile you to a holy God? That when the bible says you were dead in your trespasses, that it means it? Coram Deo family, it is dangerous ground to be on to think that you might be invited to the feast of God, to the marriage supper of the lamb, on the basis of *anything* other than faith in the finished work of Christ on your behalf..

Search your heart. Ask God to reveal the areas where your faith is weak. Get on your knees and ask the Lord for a faith like the Centurion.

## Second, **Get to the nations.**

Get to the nations. You're not getting rid of your outreach pastor that easy.

All kidding aside, this is such a clear implication from this passage. We know that many will come from the east and west and recline at the Lord's Table. However, we also know that there are many from the east and the west who won't be invited. Why? Not just because they don't believe, but because they've never heard. You can't believe the gospel--the good news that Christ alone has made a way to reconcile you to the Father—you can't believe the gospel, if you've never heard it.

Over 3 billion people currently have no access to the gospel. With no scripture in their language and no one to teach it to them even if they had it.

That fact must motivate us to action. God has prepared a table for all nations. He gave us the commission in Matthew 28 to make disciples of all nations.

And like Pastor Rob said last week, some of us are called to go. And when God says go, you need to go.

Some of us are called to go, and the rest are called to send.

And he's also raised up a family from this church to go out to the nations **(slide)**. Josh and Ally, who many of you know and love are preparing to go to reach people who have never been reached with the good news of the gospel. But they need our help. The Great Commission is not an easy task, nor is it an inexpensive one. Many of you are currently giving sacrificially above and beyond your tithe to Josh and Ally, and we are so thankful for that.

But they need more partners in order to go. In fact, after they return from language training in Canada, it's the only thing that will be holding them back. This is an incredible opportunity for us to be the church and send our people well.

**(Slide)** If you want to give, you can go to our website [coramdeobible.church/outreach/give](http://coramdeobible.church/outreach/give) and find their information. Please prayerfully consider becoming monthly partners with Josh and Ally above your tithe and send them out like we are called to do.

We need to use God's resources, to send God's people to accomplish God's purposes.

God's resources, God's people, God's purposes. Amen?

Let's close by looking at verse 13, a beautiful ending to this passage: *13 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.*

“Go, let it be done for you as you have believed.” And the servant was healed at that very moment. Our God can do it.

The invitation to the feast of God is based on faith in Jesus Christ alone. How will they believe if they have never heard? Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations. And surely He will be with you always, even to the end of the age.

Let's pray.

*Father thank you for this church. Thank you for the opportunity to minister here for the past 2 ½ years. Thank you for the people here, and the work you are doing as the gospel goes out. I pray that Coram Deo would be a people of great faith who are obedient to your call to reach the nations with the gospel. Thank you for the grace that we have in Christ Jesus, that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. I pray that we would live our lives in your presence as a new people, redeemed by the blood of the lamb, giving our lives to your work, no matter the cost. Give us strength and grace to do that. In Jesus' name, Amen.*