



LEADER'S NOTES

For use with the discussion guides drawing on the Sunday messages.

April 3, 2005
Matthew 8:1-13

OVERVIEW

As we have noted in our study of the epistle of James, James is concerned with "this world" faith. He hasn't lost sight of the truth that it is through faith that we enter into eternal life; however, his focus is more on what difference our faith makes in the way we experience life in the here and now. Our faith should make a difference in how we face trials, how we relate to others, how we "do life." But that may still leave the question: Just what is faith? This week, we turn back to an encounter Jesus had with a non-Jewish soldier for an example of "great" faith, and so gain some insight to what makes faith what it is.

DISCUSSION

Something (or someone) is "great" when they embody the best of that particular thing in view; the greatest president is clearly the one who served in that capacity the best. And, the man we meet who has "great faith" is a wonderful example for us to learn from. Watching him, we can begin to see what makes faith what it is.

We start in Matthew 8:1 so we can contrast the faith of the leper with the faith of the centurion. At first reading, they are similar in their approach to Jesus. Both apparently believe that Jesus can do something about their particular need (otherwise they wouldn't approach Him). Both make a specific request. Both ask boldly. But what marks out the centurion's faith as "great"?

Our only indication of what is in the centurion's heart is given by what he says and how he acts. In this passage, his words are particularly significant. Although you could spend a fair amount of time discussing the fine points of his remarks, the overall gist is clear: This man is saying that he will take Jesus at His word. Whatever Jesus says will settle the matter for the man.

Right there we can catch a glimpse of the heart of faith. Biblically, faith is not simply affirming things about Jesus (like, He can heal, He is from God, He is good, etc.). The Scriptures make the case that biblical faith is about building on what you know about Jesus to actually personally trusting Him. Not just affirming you think that He's "a good guy," but coming to really entrust yourself to Him.

That's what we see in the centurion's words. He is basically saying that, for him, what Jesus says settles the matter. He will trust Jesus and whatever He says. That, for the man, will be enough. And that confession is what prompts Jesus' commendation.

What does that mean for us? What can we learn from this example? Perhaps it is as simple as this: Do you act like you take Jesus at His word? Is His word enough for you?

BIG IDEA

Faith is not merely affirming what is true about Jesus, but is trusting Jesus personally, taking Him at His word.



DISCUSSION GUIDE

A small group resource for the church drawing on the Sunday messages.

April 3, 2005
Matthew 8:1-13

A weekly discussion guide designed to aid you to hear the Word, understand what you hear, and take it to heart.

Let's start with a short opinion poll:

- Who was the greatest United States president?
- Who was the greatest singer you have ever heard?
- Who was the greatest sports figure you know?

Those questions are relatively trivial, although open to debate! Here's a question that has genuine significance: Who was the one Jesus commended for his great faith? Seeing as faith is so essential to life with God, someone with great faith gives us a powerful example of how to live in that relationship. Read Matthew 8:1-13.

What did the leper want from Jesus? What did the centurion want?

What did they each receive from Him?

Notice that Jesus commends the centurion's faith; He calls it great. How do we know that the centurion has faith? (How does it differ from what we see in the leper and his response to Jesus?)

Clearly, what is essential to understanding great faith is to understand the centurion's remarks to Jesus. Try and paraphrase what this non-Jewish soldier is saying to Jesus. Put it in your own words:

Biblically, to "believe" (or "have faith") is to trust someone; it's not so much about affirming certain facts as personally entrusting yourself to someone. How can this centurion's great faith inform your understanding of what it means for you to "believe in" or "have faith" in Jesus?

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