

THE FAITH OF THE CENTURION

Matthew 8:1-17

Key Verses: 8:10-11

"When Jesus heard this, he was astonished and said to those following him, I tell you the truth, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith. I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven."

In chapters 5 through 7, Jesus taught the Golden Rules, the constitution of the [kingdom of God](#). Now, in chapters 8 and 9, Jesus focuses on healing the sick and planting faith in his young disciples. In Ch. 8:1-17, Jesus heals many kinds of sick people. Jesus heals a man with leprosy (1-4). Jesus heals a centurion's servant (5-13). Jesus heals Peter's wife's mother (14,15). Jesus heals many who were brought to the doors at sunset (16,17). Matthew prayerfully records Jesus' healing ministry, emphasizing the healing power of Jesus' word. Worldly kings have wounded and killed so many people. But King Jesus heals and makes men whole with his word. Matthew, a wretched man who was very sick with sin, heard Jesus' word to him, "Follow me," and was healed and made whole by Jesus. Since Matthew was healed, he became the man who wrote the Sermon on the Mount. He became a man who loved Jesus the most. In today's passage, a Roman centurion astonishes Jesus with his faith in Jesus' word. May God bless us to learn the faith of the centurion and [believe](#) that Jesus' word has the power to heal and to save.

First, Jesus heals the man with leprosy (1-4). Look at verse 1. "When he came down from the mountainside, large crowds followed him." Why did they follow Jesus? When we read the four gospels we learn that these people were mostly sick people, and that they wanted to be healed. What did Jesus do for them? Matthew points out the fact that Jesus paid attention to one particular person of all people. Who was he? He was a man with leprosy. There is deep spiritual meaning to why Jesus cared for a man with leprosy, of all the people.

In the past, leprosy was known as an incurable disease. Moreover, lepers were known as cursed by God. Leprosy makes a [man look](#) wretched. Man, as an aesthetic creature, enjoys looking in the mirror to appreciate his or her own beauty, spending quite some time, maybe too much time. But men with leprosy could not enjoy their own beauty, for their faces were covered with ulcers and their eyebrows had fallen out. Their eyes were barely supported by their sockets, and would stare pointlessly. Their voices sounded ghastly hoarse, and they wheezed in breathing. They could not mingle with others. They were supposed to be isolated from ordinary people. They had to live in "no man's land." They were lonely and sorrowful people.

They say that men with leprosy feel numb while they progressively lose their fingers and toes from their hands and feet. In this respect, leprosy is comparable to sin-sickness. Sin paralyzes man's conscience. Sin also makes man numb to his deteriorating body and soul. One girl wanted to enjoy sinful pleasure, just one time, and then come back to

study harder than before. But when she committed sin, she contracted sin-sickness. She became so sick with sin that she could not fulfill her human dreams. After committing sin, she began to complain to others whenever she had the chance, then she began to condemn herself until she was admitted to a mental hospital.

Men with leprosy were indeed men of strange fate because of their leprosy. They were also social outcasts. They had to cry out, "Unclean! Unclean!" covering the lower part of their faces whenever they happened to pass by someone else. As soon as people discovered lepers, they ran away from them, throwing stones at them as a means of self-defense. A man with leprosy could not do anything but sorrow over himself because of his ill-fate as a leper. This man with leprosy could not dare to come to Jesus, because he was ashamed of his outward appearance. Even if he decided to do something, he soon broke down because of his habit of withdrawing into himself. The man with leprosy was a man of strange fate.

Look at verse 2. "A man with leprosy came and knelt before him and said, 'Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.'" The man with leprosy was a social outcast. The man with leprosy did not deserve to come to Jesus, either legally or personally. But he came to Jesus, believing that Jesus could make him clean. At that time, everybody knew that leprosy was incurable. But the man with leprosy had faith in Jesus that Jesus could make him clean. Of course, the man with leprosy knew that he did not deserve the Son's mercy. So he knelt down before him and begged his mercy, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean." It was his act of faith.

What did Jesus do for him? Look at verse 3. "Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. 'I am willing,' he said. 'Be clean!' Immediately he was cured of his leprosy." This one verse shows us that Jesus is the Son of God who came to this world to save men from their sins. First, "Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man." This is the exact expression of God's mercy. God's mercy is greater than men's sins. One young man reached out his hand in the hope of shaking the hand of a renowned American missionary to Korea. Then the missionary refused to shake hands by hitting the young man's outstretched hand, thinking he was too presumptuous. The missionary expected that the young man would bow his head with respect and honor. In the past, French colonizers would beat Vietnamese people mercilessly if the Vietnamese did not bow their heads when the French passed by. It was permissible for the Vietnamese to bow down and pay homage to the French, but they were not allowed to shake hands with them. Fallen men are groundlessly proud and insolent.

But Jesus first reached out his hand and touched the man. Nobody wanted to come close to this man. But Jesus came close to him. Nobody wanted to be touched by a leper. But Jesus touched him. Nobody was willing to help him. But Jesus was willing. Everybody believed that leprosy was incurable. But Jesus said, "Be clean!" Immediately he was cured of his leprosy. Read verse 4. "Then Jesus said to him, 'See that you don't tell anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the gift Moses commanded, as a testimony to them.'" Jesus was not afraid of infection, much less of violating the law, which said not to approach within 16 feet of a leper. Jesus reached out his hand and

touched him because he had the healing power over leprosy. Jesus not only has the healing power over leprosy, he also has the healing power over those who are sick with sin. Jesus' healing the leper reminds us of Isaiah 53:4a. "Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows...." "He took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows" sounds poetic and seems not so difficult to practice. But when we examine our sinful nature, our Lord Jesus Christ's messianic work is beyond human ability. For example, we like to see those who look good. But we can't bear to talk with those we don't like. But our Lord Jesus Christ carried all our infirmities and diseases, despite ourselves.

Second, Jesus heals a centurion's servant (5-13). Look at verse 5. "When Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him, asking for help." Centurions were the core of the Roman army. There are many beautiful stories about centurions in the gospels. At that time, a slave had no legal rights whatsoever. The owner of a slave was free to treat him as he wished. But this centurion was different. All other centurions of the world would throw out their slaves when they became sick, or sell them like old junk cars. But this centurion was grieved when his servant became ill. This centurion saw his servant as his own son. Because of this, he did not hold on to his pride of being a Roman centurion. He was willing to curb his pride and ignore his prestige if only he could help his servant. This centurion had noble humanity within him.

But the centurion's real greatness lies in his faith in the word of Jesus. Look at verses 7 and 8. "Jesus said to him, 'I will go and heal him.' The centurion replied, 'Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed.'" Through this brief conversation we can see that, regardless of his servant's terrible condition, the centurion put his faith in the power of Jesus' word. Jesus said to him, "I will go and heal him." But the centurion thought he did not deserve to have Jesus come to his house, for he knew that Jews thought of Gentiles as unclean. At the same time, he believed that Jesus' word had healing power. The centurion had faith in Jesus' word. We need this kind of faith. We must believe that Jesus can heal us with his word. We must believe that Jesus can heal all our sheep when they believe in his words.

Look at verse 10. "When Jesus heard this, he was astonished and said to those following him, 'I tell you the truth, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith.'" Jesus was never amazed by anything or anybody. But he was amazed by the centurion's faith in his word and said, "I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith." There are many kinds of faith, but the faith that Jesus admires is faith in his word.

Jesus was happy because of the centurion's faith. At the same time, Jesus was sorry about his own chosen people's unbelief in his word, and because they did not have membership in the kingdom of heaven. So Jesus said, "I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness..." (11,12).

Look at verse 13. "Then Jesus said to the centurion, 'Go! It will

be done just as you believed it would.' And his servant was healed at that very hour." The servant was healed because of the centurion's faith that believed in Jesus' word. Here we learn that we must have faith in Jesus' word. Peter was a man who was very hard to change because of his political ambition. He was sick with worldly desires. But he was changed by the word of Jesus and said in 1 Peter 1:23, "For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God."

Third, Jesus heals many (14-17). Jesus went to Peter's home and healed Peter's mother-in-law's fever (15). When evening came, Jesus drove out evil spirits from many people who were suffering from evil spirits, and healed all the sick (16). Jesus came into this world to heal all our sin-sicknesses. Isaiah spoke of this: "He took up our infirmities and carried our diseases" (Isa 53:4). When we see men and women of infirmities, we are disgusted. We don't like anyone who burdens us. But Jesus came into this world to take up our infirmities. Jesus came to this world to carry our diseases.

As Matthew sees, Jesus is the Messiah, King of kings and Lord of lords. But Jesus did not exercise his worldly authority over men. Jesus used his divine power to heal all our sinsicknesses. Jesus humbled himself and took up our infirmities and carried our diseases. Our Lord Jesus is our Shepherd and our spiritual King, the Messiah. In this chapter we learn that Jesus has authority to heal and restore sinsick mankind. Jesus was sorry that God's chosen people were unbelieving. But Jesus had hope and vision that the Gentiles would believe and enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore we must have the faith of the centurion and come to Jesus for healing and salvation through faith in his word.