

The centurion is an example of the “many Gentiles who will come from the east and the west” and be welcomed at the banquet table of heaven where the “fathers” of Israel will be seated in the kingdom of God. He is declaring that heaven will be populated with people who believe like the centurion, not by those who are simply related to Abraham racially or who perform religious rituals to gain God’s favor. The subjects of the kingdom are Jewish people who do not believe like the centurion, which at that moment was the majority of people in Israel. It cannot mean that no Jewish people are going to be in heaven because Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are all Jewish. If we ask how is the centurion like Abe, Isaac and Jacob, we see that he had faith like them (see Hebrews 11:6, 8-10, 17-21).

Jesus uses his power and authority to help the weak because the weak know who they are and who he is

If you were a Jewish person watching how Jesus dealt with this Roman officer and then hearing what Jesus says, how might you feel?

You would either be very angry or you would be very afraid.

What does this metaphor of a feast tell us about heaven? What does the metaphor of “being thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” tell us about the nature of hell?

Heaven is a place of intimacy and warmth and light and joy and abundance. It’s a party in the best sense of that word where only people who have trusted God’s promise to save will be. Hell is a place of darkness, outside the party where there will only be the weeping of suffering and the gnashing of teeth of despair.

How does Jesus conclude his conversation with the centurion?

“What you believed could happen, has happened.” Jesus does what the centurion asked and what he believed could happen if Jesus wanted it to happen.

Is your faith like that of the centurion? Do you pray as he prayed? Are you confident that you will be welcomed into that banquet where Abraham, Isaac and Jacob will be? If you are confident, why is that? If you aren’t, why not?

A centurion is an officer in the Roman army. Usually he was in charge of 100 Roman soldiers. This centurion was in Capernaum, a port city on the sea of Galilee in northern Israel. He was there to enforce Roman law among the Jewish people who live there. This man is not Jewish, he is a Gentile.

What is his problem? How do you think he is feeling? What is it that he wants from Jesus?

He has a trusted servant at home who is paralyzed and suffering terribly. He obviously is very troubled by his servant's suffering and wants it to end. He comes to Jesus for the purpose of getting his servant healed.

How does Jesus respond to the centurion's announcement of the illness of his servant? Is there anything remarkable about Jesus' response?

He says that he will go to his house and heal his servant. He doesn't ask any questions. He doesn't require anything of this non-Jewish man. He declares that it is his will to go and to heal. He doesn't say he'll look into it. He doesn't tell the centurion to wait. He simply declares his will is to go and to heal.

How does the centurion respond to Jesus' intention to come and to heal?

He declares that he is unworthy to have Jesus come to his house. He declares his confidence that all Jesus has to do is to say the word and his servant will be healed. He then compares Jesus to himself. This analogy gives the reason for his confidence that Jesus only has to say the word.

How does Jesus respond to what the centurion says?

He is amazed and declares that he has not found anyone in Israel with such great faith. NOTE: This is only one of two times that Jesus is amazed. The only other time we are told that Jesus is amazed is in Mark 6:6 where Jesus is amazed at the lack of faith in his disciples.

Here's the million dollar question in this story, what is it about this man's faith that amazes Jesus?

*The contrast with Israel is this: the people of Israel have the OT scriptures, the temple, the priesthood, the sacrifices and 3000 years of history as God's people. They should know who Jesus is and they should trust him completely. The centurion exhibits an insight into the nature of Jesus' relationship with his Father that no one, not even the disciples possessed and yet they ought to know. The centurion recognizes that just as his authority comes from being under the authority of the emperor, so Jesus' authority comes from being under the authority of his Father. The centurion is obeyed because his commands have the authority of the emperor behind them. Jesus' commands have the authority of God behind them. He doesn't quite understand the Trinity but he understands the nature of Jesus' relationship with the Father in ways the Jews don't and they ought to have understood. The other amazing thing about the centurion's faith is its humility. He knows that if Jesus helps him it will not be because he has earned the help. He knows that any kindness he is given is a gift and contrary to what he deserves. This is not how the Jewish people approached God. Finally, his faith is amazing because he is absolutely certain that if Jesus wants to heal his servant all he has to do is say so and it will occur. We see the same thing as the leper, submission to the will of Jesus accompanied by certainty that Jesus can do whatever he wills. **SUMMARY:** Jesus is amazed at the centurion's faith because...*

- 1. He is not a Jew and so doesn't have the advantages of knowing the Scriptures.*
- 2. He knows that he doesn't deserve to have Jesus do anything for him. He is not worthy of God's help and so any help he receives will be a gift of grace.*
- 3. He is submissive to Jesus' will but certain that whatever Jesus wants to do he is able to do.*
- 4. He understands that Jesus' authority is a derived authority. He only does what God does but what Jesus does is what God does. Jesus' words are God's words and his will is God's will.*

Jesus uses the contrast of the Gentile centurion's faith with the unbelief of Israel to say something about who is going to populate heaven and who is going to populate hell. What does he say about who is going to be in heaven and who will be in hell?

result of the impact of God's word in his life. Here are two possible passages that could have helped him.

First, he could have remembered the three times in the OT when God gave people leprosy as judgement on their sin. Miriam for rebelling against Moses in Numbers 5, Gehazi for his greed and hypocrisy in 2 Kings 5 and Uzziah for his pride in 2 Chronicles 26. He may then have reasoned in this way: "As he meditated on the sins of these three people and God's judgement of giving each of them leprosy, he came to see himself in each of them. He knew that like Miriam, he had rebelled against the law of Moses and had not kept all of God's laws and decrees. He knew that, like Gehazi, he had lied in order to get things he thought were important. He knew that like Uzziah, pride was his constant companion and that he often had arrogantly demanded his own way in relation to God and other people. He had come to marvel, not that God had given him leprosy but that was all that God had given him. He knew that he deserved much worse. He knew he deserved to be dead and in hell. He marveled at the grace of God in not giving every human being leprosy because he knew that the Scriptures were true that declared, "there is no one righteous, not even one.""

Second he could have read Psalm 119: 71 (or other statements to the same effect) which says, "It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees." He could have seen his leprosy as God's tool to teach him to love God and trust in him above all things. He could have come to delight in and hope in God as he saw that all else was hopeless. He could have meditated on David's words in Psalm 73:25-26, "Whom have I in heaven but you and earth has nothing I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever."

NOTE TO LEADER: I think this is a very important question. It would be helpful to go to these OT passages and to consider these possible ways that God might have used to bring this man to humble submission to his will.

How does your view of suffering and your prayers when you are suffering compare to the leper?

How does Jesus respond to his request?

He tells him that he is willing and then he stretches out his hand and touches him and says, "Be clean." Then he commands the man not to tell anyone about what he has done but to instead to go show the priest and offer the sacrifice that Moses commanded.

If you were in Jesus' position would you touch this leper? Why does Jesus touch him?

No, because it would mean that you were intentionally making yourself unclean and therefore cut off from and God and people. Jesus, shows that rather than being made unclean when he touches the leper he makes him clean. Jesus displays not only his power over the disease but his ability to make people acceptable to God. He displays the great compassion and kindness of God towards the weak and helpless.

Why does Jesus tell him not to tell anyone but to only show the priest?

Jesus is not interested in stirring up popular sentiment but in bearing testimony to who he is. Jesus is not interested in the verbal testimony of the leper but in his healed life being a testimony to the Jews of who he is. The healing of the leper is to function as a piece of evidence pointing to who Jesus is. It is meant to warn against unbelief and to encourage faith in Jesus and what he says.

What does Jesus' response tell us about Jesus?

He is willing to help those who are submissive to his will and confident of his ability to do whatever he wants to do. He delights to help people who cannot help themselves, who are unable to do anything to save themselves and are willing to live with his will for them.

When you see the compassion and power of Jesus how does it impact your desire to trust him and love him?

Jesus uses his power and authority to help the weak because the weak submit to his will.

What is a centurion? What is he doing in Capernaum?

HE GLADLY HELPS THE WEAK

Matt. 8:1-17 (Based on sermon 10/1/00)

INTRODUCION

What has been the most impressive person or thing that you have personally seen with your own eyes? How did you respond? How did seeing this person or thing affect you?

John 1: 14 says, “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.” John here shows that one of the chief characteristics of a Christian is they have “seen” the glory of Christ. The implication being then that those who “see” him delight in him. In fact, this is the meaning of Paul’s command, “Rejoice in the Lord”. Jonathon Edwards summarized this central teaching of the Bible in this way: “God is glorified not only by His glory’s being seen, but by its being rejoiced in. When those that see it delight in it, God is more glorified than if they only see it. His glory is then received by the whole soul, both by the understanding and by the heart.”

We are going to begin a study in Matthew’s gospel. The primary ambition of this series is for each of us to “see” the glory of Jesus and so rejoice in him. Today’s story shows Jesus’ glory in his desire and ability to help weak and helpless people.

STUDY

Read vv. 1-4 and Leviticus 13: 1-3 & 45-46 and 14: 1-11. Based on these descriptions of how God told the Israelites to deal with “infectious skin diseases” (i.e., leprosy) describe the kind of life this leper was living. Describe what he has had to go through prior to this meeting with Jesus. Describe how the crowd might have responded to this leper approaching Jesus.

This man was living outside of all the towns of Israel. He lived alone or perhaps with others who shared his disease. He wore tattered clothes and a veil over his face. His hair was unkempt. He had rashes or open sores on his body that were at least uncomfortable and probably

painful. At one point he was clean and then when the rash appeared he had to go to the priest and was declared unclean. He could not go near the temple to pray or worship or offer sacrifices. He was completely cut off from God and people. When he was around people he had to cry out, “Unclean, Unclean.”

How do you think a person in this condition might feel? How might he feel about God?

Despair and hopelessness must have been very common emotions. Bitterness towards God is a possibility. Envy towards those who are “clean” might afflict him.

How does the leper approach Jesus? What is his request? What is he certain of and what is he uncertain of?

He falls on his knees in the posture of begging and of submission. He is sure that Jesus has the ability to cleanse him. He doesn’t know if Jesus is willing to cleanse him.

How does the leper’s request strike you? How would you describe the way he approaches Jesus?

He does not demand that Jesus help him. He is willing to submit to Jesus’ will. He is absolutely certain that Jesus has the power to cleanse him but he is not sure if Jesus is willing. He is submissive to the will of Jesus and knows that he has no right to demand to be healed. He shows that he is not complaining about having leprosy and that he knows that it is not unfair that he has leprosy. He is willing to live with the will of Jesus.

Here’s the million dollar question, how did this leper come to the place of being submissive to the will of God? How was he able to say, “If you are willing”?

We do not know with certainty how he arrived at this place of rest in the will of God in the face of such great suffering. However, when we remember that this man is Jewish and therefore in possession of God’s word in the OT scriptures we can conclude that his submission is the