

THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

want to, you can cleanse me, restore me, heal me, fill me!" He lays His reassuring hands upon you, saying, "I want to, come to me. I will give you rest and cleansing."

"THE MASTER MARVELLED"

(8:5-13)

What can excite the wonder and admiration of Jesus of Nazareth? The times of Jesus' earthly ministry were days loaded with excitement, but they must not dim our sight of the Lord Himself. If we desire to delight this Master, let us pay attention to what brings Him highest joy. There are some genuinely impressive facts in this text: what one fact drew Jesus' attention leaving Him overjoyed and amazed? Matthew tells us of . . .

I. AN UNEXPECTED COMPASSION. Ours is a cruel, hard-nosed, "business is business" world, where men climb the heights to a success over the bent backs of their inferiors, the less fortunate.

A. An unlikely object of compassion was the centurion's slave.

1. Slaves in the Roman empire were no better than a living tool, differing from other things possessed by owner in the sense that the slave could talk. Slaves too sick, too old or too unable or unwilling to work could be disposed of in any manner the master chose.

2. But here in this household the anguished cry from a paralyzed human being, though a slave, was heard!

B. An unlikely person for expressing such compassion was the centurion.

1. His military career had not been able to extinguish his human concern for another human being.

H. P. Hughes commented: "I know nothing more noble, more indicative of the godlike man, than a proper courtesy and thoughtfulness and a disinterested and unselfish care for those who are our social inferiors."

2. The centurion was not Jewish, therefore, technically a pagan. What opportunities had he had for knowing God's revelation? What circumstances had God combined to bring him to his love for the subject people over which his own government had posted him to keep law and order?

C. No, while this compassion and unexpected generosity certainly surprises us, this is not yet what caused the Master to marvel.

SERMON ON CHAPTER EIGHT

II. AN UNPRECEDENTED AFFECTION. (Read Luke 7:1-10) Here Jewish elders actually intercede with Jesus on behalf of the Capernaum centurion—yes, a centurion!

- A. He was more a candidate for assassination, not assistance.
1. In the Jewish struggle for independence from the Roman yoke, every Roman official, every collaborator with Rome, every supporter of Roman government would be viewed with suspicion, if not outright hatred.
 2. But here we find the precise opposite to be the case: responsible Jewish citizens expressing unprecedented affection for a centurion.
 - a. Why *should* they hesitate to help him? "He loves our nation. He built us our synagogue!"
 - b. Herein is a sentence sermon: Sterile orthodoxy that does not love, that does not act, is not orthodox!
 - c. The orthodox deeds of one Gentile centurion produced more concrete results, more humanity, more genuine affection and deep-felt appreciation than all the orthodox speculations of a hundred theologians.
- B. Who were these "elders"? Was Jairus among them? What about the royal official (Jn. 4:46-54) whose son Jesus had already healed?
- C. What opportunities had they had for knowing God's revelation? What witness had they given to this centurion concerning Jesus? Had they been as generous with the centurion as he had been with them? Many of these intriguing questions stimulate our imagination, as they fill in the flesh-and-blood outline of these real people.
- D. The actions of these men who normally would not be known to be so solicitous for a Roman's needs lead us to feel their unprecedented affection for him, and yet even this example rising above usual Jewish parochialism did not excite the wonder of our Lord so much as

III. AN UNEXAMPLED FAITH. That did it! Nothing turns the head of Jesus of Nazareth so quickly as the concrete expression of real belief! What was the formula of his "great confession"?

A. "I am not worthy."

1. He is a Roman who says this to an itinerate Jewish Rabbi!
2. This is obviously real humility: the higher he held Jesus, the lower he esteemed his own power, position, accomplishments and person.

THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

3. This confession of unworthiness was his highest claim to being actually worthy of the Kingdom! (Mt. 5:3)
- B. "I understand authority and I know you possess it." When he had learned to confess Israel's God as his own and to believe Jesus to be absolutely unlimited in the exercise of God's power, this centurion permitted no frivolous objections to hinder his decisive action, such as might be raised by scribes and Pharisees of his day.
- C. "Only speak the word, and my servant will be healed."
1. What an intelligent grasp of the fundamental principle underlying God's government of the world! (Ps. 33:6-9; Heb. 1:1-4; 2 Pe. 3:5-7)
 2. The centurion knew that if one simple word from Jesus could not cure his slave, hundreds of mumbled or shrieked incantations from others were so far less incapable of bringing the slave back to life and health. One powerful word from Jesus is all that is needed: "Just give the command, Sir."
- D. This kind of faith brought Jesus joy, wonder and admiration just because it was so rare, strong, pure and real. Why great?
1. The centurion was sensitive to human need; religious people can be so unseeing, so deaf to concrete hard life problems.
 2. The centurion had overcome gigantic obstacles of prejudice to bow before this Jewish Teacher; more often "the right people" would have called this "improper" at least, or unthinkable, at most, for a man of his position. Honesty compelled him.
 3. Despite the difficulties that would have choked the momentary enthusiasm, the conflicting theories and contradictory logic and broken the reasonably resilient faith of others, the centurion arrived at a determined conclusion and with confident firmness confided his case to Jesus.
 4. The centurion was humble enough to recognize the high holiness of Jesus. Our "humility" is often so pretentious! By contrast, this centurion was willing not to be honored by the Lord's presence.
 5. The centurion, even though a Gentile and in much more need of it, did not ask Jesus for a confirmatory sign for verification of the reality of His power before working the miracle. (Contrast Gideon's fleece, Judg. 6:36-40; or the Jew's demand for signs, Mt. 16:1-4)

SERMON ON CHAPTER EIGHT

6. The centurion showed careful planning by sending the elders, men whose religious views he thought would not be so likely to clash with Jesus as would perhaps the Gentile unworthiness of the centurion himself. Thus, he showed himself keenly sensitive even to Jesus' views, as a man.
7. His faith had been intelligently arrived at. Simple trust of Jesus may be acceptable, but Jesus is more stirred by a man whose faith is the result of his mental wrestling with facts, theories, alternatives, prejudices, personal ignorance and desires and who STILL decides to believe Jesus. The centurion had shown careful reasoning behind his actions.

This leads us around to

IV. AN UNTHOUGHT-OF-CONCLUSION. The tables are turned; the relations reversed!

A. The UNWELCOME are welcomed! (Mt. 8:10, 11)

1. Jesus praised the "pagan" centurion's faith: "I tell you I have not found so great faith!"
2. Jesus answered a "pagan's" prayer, wrapped the loving arms of God's compassion around both men:
 - a. around the hated man, the agent of a foreign government occupying one's homeland.
 - b. around the despised man, the slave, the living tool with no human rights and no legal existence except as property of his master.
 - c. "I will come and heal him . . . (later) Go your way; as you have believed, so be it done for you." Jesus knew neither Jew nor Roman, slave nor free, male nor female; He only recognized human need. No prejudice was strong enough to hold Jesus within its narrow, provincial bounds.
3. Jesus threw open the doors to God's Kingdom to believing Gentiles like this centurion. (Mt. 8:11)

B. The ELITE are excluded! Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God are not the exclusive possessions of any exclusive race of men. He is the possession of every man in every nation in whose heart there is FAITH.

1. Jesus' amazement at the centurion's faith was caused directly by the contrast with the usual, dull lack of deep commitment He met in the very people who had enjoyed God's preparation for Messiah's coming.

THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

2. Jesus' voice reflected the tragedy of unbelief: "I have not found so great faith, *no, not in Israel!*" With a reluctance that throbbled with the love of God, Jesus condemned unbelievers to hell (vs. 12)

Yes, Jesus marvelled at the faith found in this very unlikely person, He encouraged the man as far as circumstances permitted and answered the centurion's request. Any Jew standing around could probably have said, "Who would have thought that THAT man could be the object of God's mercy?"

All of us make a very unlikely crowd to be the special objects of God's continued mercy! But the point is: He does care. Who would have thought that WE could be Christians? But we began with the confession: "I am not worthy. . . . Jesus, you are our Authority: only speak the word and we will live!"

CHAPTER NINE OUTLINES

- Section 18. Jesus Forgives and Heals a Paralytic (9:2-8)
- Section 19. Jesus Calls Matthew Levi to be Apostle (9:9-17)
- Section 20. Jesus Raises Jairus' Daughter (9:18-26)
and Heals Woman's Hemorrhage
- Section 21. Jesus Gives Sight to Two Blind Men (9:27-34)
- Section 22. Jesus Evangelizes Galilee (9:35-38)

STUDY OUTLINE

- I. JESUS FORGIVES AND HEALS A PARALYTIC (9:2-8) at a "Congressional Investigation."
 - A. Situation: house full of critics, Jesus in midst. Paralytic lowered through roof into Jesus' presence.
 - B. Crisis: Jesus forgives the sins of the paralytic
 1. Pharisaic reasoning: "blasphemy!"
 2. Jesus' reasoning: "It is my right."
 - C. Conclusion: Jesus, as God, has power on earth to forgive sin.
- II. JESUS CALLS MATTHEW LEVI TO BE APOSTLE (9:9-17)
 - A. The Call of Matthew (9:9)
 - B. The Concept of the Master: "I am Physician for the sick, at work where I belong. (9:10-13)
 - C. The Controversy: feasting versus fasting (9:14-17).
 1. Situation: Disciples of John and Pharisees fasted, while Jesus' disciples feasted.