

Matthew 8:5-13; Luke 7:1-10*NIV Harmony 78-79; Loyal 75-78 Compassionate 89-91***Introduction**

1. How much faith do you have? How much faith do you put into practice?
 - a. What you truly believe about Jesus is demonstrated when you face the trials and adversities of life.
 - b. In this passage, Jesus showed His compassion and care for the servant of a Gentile, a Roman centurion, who has great faith in Jesus and put it into practice.
2. Matthew recorded a shorter version of this miracle story (cf., Mt 8:5-13). We will read it from Luke's fuller account in Lk 7:1-10 and compare Luke's account with that of Matthew.
3. **Read Lk 7:1-10.**

A. A Request of Jesus by a Centurion (Mt 8:5-6; Lk 7:1-6a)

1. Matthew's thematic organization of material places this account as the middle miracle story of three showing Jesus' concern for outcasts (i.e., a leper (cf., Mt 8:1-4), a Roman centurion (cf., Mt 8:5-13), and a woman—Peter's mother-in-law (cf., Mt 8:14-17). In the thematic outline of Matthew's gospel, Mt 8:1-9:35 includes three sets of three miracle stories each. These miracle stories follow Jesus' powerful teaching in the Sermon on the Mount and reveal the truth of that teaching by His working of miracles. These miracles reveal both His care for all people (i.e., Gentiles, outcasts, and women) and His authority over disease, nature, and the spiritual realm—all of creation.
2. Both Matthew and Luke gave the setting of this account as Capernaum (cf., Mt 8:5, Lk 7:1).
3. Luke noted that these events occurred, "When Jesus had finished saying all this in the hearing of the people...." (Lk 7:1). The "saying all this" to which Luke refers was the Sermon on the Mount which immediately preceded this story in Luke's gospel.
4. Both Matthew and Luke revealed that the need in this story was healing for a Roman centurion's servant.
 - a. A Roman centurion (Gk., *ekatontarchos* – "ruler of a hundred") was typically the commander of a garrison of 100 soldiers.
 - b. This centurion was most likely a soldier serving under the command of Herod Antipas, the ruler of Galilee, since there is no record of Roman troops being garrisoned in Galilee at this time.
 - c. Wiersbe states, "In the Gospels and the book of Acts, Roman centurions are presented as quality men of character, and this one is a sterling example. The Jewish elders had little love for the Romans in general and Roman soldiers in particular, and yet the elders commended this officer to Jesus. He loved the Jewish people in Capernaum and even built them a synagogue. He loved his servant and did not want him to die....Imagine a Roman officer telling a poor Jewish rabbi that he was unworthy to have Him enter his house! The Romans were not known for displaying humility, especially before their Jewish subjects." (Wiersbe, *Be Compassionate*, 89-90).
5. Who asked Jesus for help?
 - a. Matthew had the centurion approaching Jesus directly with his need, "Lord (Gk., *Kurie*)...my servant (Gk., *ho pais mou*) lies at home paralyzed (Gk., *paralutikos*) and in terrible suffering (Gk., *basanizomenos*)" (Mt 5:6).
 - b. In Luke's account, the centurion did not speak directly with Jesus.
 - 1) Instead of coming to Jesus himself, he sent "some elders (Gk., *presbuteros*) of the Jews" to Jesus to intercede for his servant whom he "valued highly" (Gk., *os en auto entimos*) and who was "sick and about to die" (Lk 7:2-3).
 - 2) Note these "elders" were not the scribes and Pharisees from Jerusalem but were local synagogue officials from Galilee, perhaps even from the synagogue in Capernaum.
 - c. Warren Wiersbe states, "Matthew's condensed report (Matt. 8:5-13) does not contradict Luke's fuller account. The centurion's friends represented him to Jesus and then represented Jesus to him. When a newscaster reports that the president or the prime minister said something to Congress or Parliament, this does not necessarily mean that the message was delivered by them in person. It was probably delivered by one of their official representatives, but the message would be received as from the president or prime minister personally" (Warren Wiersbe, *Be Compassionate*, 90).

d. In Luke's account the "elders" (Gk., *presbuteros*) "pleaded earnestly" (Gk., *parekaloun auton spoudaios*) with Jesus and said, "This man deserves to have you do this, because he loves (Gk., *agapea*) our nation and has built our synagogue" (Lk 7:4-5).

- 1) Robert Stein notes, "The centurion may have been a 'god-fearer,' i.e., a Gentile who believed in the teachings of Judaism and kept the moral law but who had not become a Jewish proselyte (cf. Acts 10:2,22; 13:16,26)" (Robert Stein, *Luke* in NAC, 219).
- 2) Perhaps the centurion respected Jewish law and customs and did not want Jesus to become defiled by coming "under my roof" (Lk 7:6). Stein notes, "For a Jew to enter a Gentile's home would defile him ceremonially. The centurion knew this and did not want to subject Jesus to ritual impurity (cf. Acts 10:23; 11:2,12). This passage is a good example of the social and religious gap that existed between Jew and Greek in the first century and with which the early church struggled" (Stein, 219-20).
- 3) However, it is perhaps more likely that the centurion's statements reflect his personal belief that he was simply "not...worthy" (Gk., *ikanos* in Lk 7:6) to have Jesus enter his home. We will look at this in more detail later in this study. The centurion was certainly a humble man.

6. Who needed Jesus' help?

- a. In Luke's account, the elders quoted the centurion as they asked for Jesus' help to heal his "servant" (Gk., *pais*, cf., Lk 7:2). Later, the centurion used the more general term for "servant" (Gk. *doulo*, cf., Lk 7:7) as does Matthew 8:9. The two terms are synonymous in this account.
- b. Two amazing things in this account are:
 - 1) The centurion was so concerned for a servant that he sent to Jesus for his healing.
 - 2) Jesus responded to the need by going to heal the servant at once.

B. The Response of the Centurion (Mt 8:8-9; Lk 7:6b-8)

1. As Jesus was on His way to the centurion's home, the centurion responded directly in Matthew's account and through his "friends" (Gk., *philiou*, cf., Lk 7:6) in Luke's account.
 - a. Perhaps these "friends" were again Jewish elders or perhaps other friends who came from his home?
 - b. This centurion apparently had many friends and was well loved.
2. The centurion said, "Lord, I do not deserve (Gk., *ikanos*) to have you come under my roof. But say the word, and my servant will be healed" (Lk 7:7; Mt 8:8).
 - a. Earlier the elders had declared, "This man deserves (Gk., *aksios* – "is worthy") to have you do this...." (Lk 7:4)
 - b. Now, the centurion, in both Luke's and Matthew's accounts said, "I do not deserve (Gk., *ikanos*) to have you come under my roof (Lk 7:6)
 - c. G. Campbell Morgan comments, "The word 'worthy' [NIV "deserve"] there is not the same word that the rulers had used of him. His word meant sufficient; I am not sufficient that Thou shouldest come under my roof; that is to say, he was expressing his sense that he could not entertain Jesus as Jesus ought to be entertained. Continuing, however, he said: 'Neither thought I myself worthy [NIV also "worthy"]'. There he did use the word they had used....He said to Jesus: I am not competent, I am not sufficient to entertain Thee, and I do not think I am worthy to come to Thee myself. That was his own opinion of himself" (G. Campbell Morgan, *The Gospel According to Luke*, 93).
3. The centurion's rationale for Jesus not coming to his home was the same in both Matthew and Luke.
 - a. The centurion believed that Jesus has authority to heal. All that Jesus needed to do was to speak and it would be so. There was no need to trouble Jesus by having Him come to the centurion's house.
 - b. The centurion was a man under authority and also a man of authority (Gk., *exousian*) who gave commands to the soldiers under him that were immediately fulfilled.
 - c. The word "also" (Gk. *kai*) is not translated in the NIV but appears in the KJV and is an important first word in the Greek version of Lk 7:8. The centurion knew the power of a command from a superior to a subordinate!

- d. G. Campbell Morgan writes, "I also am a man under authority. This man saw that Jesus was under authority, and therefore in authority. He had a marvelous conception of the truth of the philosophy of the life of Jesus. Said the centurion, in effect, Just as I am under authority and therefore in authority, just as I exercise the authority I am under, and apply it to those who are under me; so art Thou under authority, and because Thou are under the authority which is the ultimate, and final authority, Thou art in authority....He recognized that under the authority of God, [Jesus] was completely in authority over all the things of life. His venture of faith was made upon the basis of that understanding" (Morgan, 94).
- e. The centurion's statement revealed that he saw Jesus as a powerful miracle-worker from God, perhaps even the Messiah, who had even greater authority than he did as a Roman centurion.
- f. Luke and Matthew recorded his words identically: "For I myself am a man under authority with soldiers under me. I tell this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and that one 'Come,' and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it." (Mt 8:9, Lk 7:8)
- g. Wiersbe notes, "The officer saw a parallel between the way he commanded his soldiers and the way Jesus commanded diseases....What tremendous faith this man exhibited! No wonder Jesus marveled" (Wiersbe, *Be Compassionate*, 91). And so, we come to the response of Jesus.

C. The Response of Jesus (Mt 8:10-13; Lk 7:9-10)

1. Matthew recorded that Jesus was "astonished" (Gk., *ethaumasen*), and Luke recorded that He was "amazed" (Gk., *ethaumasen*) (Mt 8:10, Lk 7:9).
 - a. Both Matthew and Luke recorded the same Greek word to express Jesus' reaction.
 - b. This is a word often used of people's reactions to Jesus but rarely is it a word used to describe Jesus' reaction to others.
 - c. In fact, Wiersbe notes, "Twice in the gospel record we are told that Jesus marveled. Here in Capernaum, He marveled at the faith of a Gentile; and in Nazareth, He marveled at the unbelief of the Jews (Mark 6:6). The only other person Jesus commended for having 'great faith' was a Gentile woman whose daughter He delivered from a demon (Matt. 15:28)" (Wiersbe, *Be Compassionate*, 90).
2. Both Matthew and Luke recorded Jesus' words in almost identical language, "I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel" (Lk 7:9).
3. Matthew added to Jesus' exclamation a two-verse statement related to judgment in the kingdom.
 - a. Of course, Jesus concluded the Sermon on the Mount with a teaching about God's ultimate judgment of each of us via the parable of the wise and foolish builders.
 - b. Luke included these words of Jesus later in Lk 13:28-29 in the context of Jesus' teaching about the narrow door to the kingdom of God and the fate of those who chose not to enter it.
4. Matthew recorded Jesus as saying, "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, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Mt 8:11-12).
 - a. Remember Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven" (Mt 7:21) and "Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?" (Lk 6:46).
 - b. Certainly, the centurion was a wise builder who was rooting his life and actions in kingdom truth.
 - c. Stein notes, "The centurion is a paradigm of many outside Judaism ('from the east and the west'—cf. Ps 107:3) who will become Jesus' followers. Jesus thus points forward to a time beyond his earthly ministry when Gentiles will flock to the faith. More sobering is his observation that even as newcomers arrive, many from within Judaism ('subjects of the kingdom'), who by ancestry believe themselves still part of God's covenant, will discover that they are not in the kingdom at all but painfully and eternally excluded from God's presence....Happily, those who do respond positively to Jesus in this age, from whatever ethnic background, will join the faithful Israelites of previous generations (classically represented by Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) to enjoy eternal fellowship with God....taking 'their places at the feast,' the messianic banquet image depicting the intimate fellowship among God's people in the age to come (cf. Isa 25:6-9; 65:13-14)" (Stein, 142).

5. The healing of the servant.
 - a. Matthew closed his account with direct words from Jesus to the centurion, "... 'Go! It will be done just as you believed (Gk., *os episteusas genethto soi*) it would.' And his servant was healed at that very hour" (Mt 8:13).
 - b. Luke simply recorded the outcome: "Then the men who had been sent returned to the house and found the servant well" (Lk 7:10).
 - c. Note that the servant was healed at a distance and without Jesus saying or doing anything directly.
 - d. The servant was healed by Jesus' divine will in response to the centurion's great faith. Faith is the key!

C. Reflections

1. Jesus came to heal and to save all who call upon Him.
2. We all need friends who care for us and intercede with Jesus for us like the centurion did for his servant and the centurion's friends did for him.
3. The centurion demonstrated the truth that being a part of God's kingdom is about giving your heart to God and allowing the love and good things God places in your heart to flow outward in loving and kind deed to others no matter who they are.
4. The demonstration of the centurion's faith was his belief that all that was needed was for Jesus to give the word and his servant would be healed.
5. The key to the servant's healing was the centurion's faith.
6. Wiersbe notes, "If this Roman, with very little spiritual instruction, had that kind of faith in God's Word, how much greater *our* faith ought to be! We have an entire Bible to read and study...yet we are guilty of 'no faith' (Mark 4:40) or 'little faith' (Matt. 14:31). Our prayer ought to be, 'Lord, increase our faith!' (Luke 17:5)" (Wiersbe, *Be Compassionate*, 91).