

Matthew 8 (5-13) What faith! What authority! What a warning!

When we were very young we clung to every word our parents said, didn't we? We used to bombard them with questions left right and centre. I know me and my brothers and sister did. Children are inquisitive little things, aren't they? (Or is 'annoying' the word?!) They just want to know the answers, everything is new and needs explaining. Questions like: If you drop bread, why does it always land butter side down? Why do we drive on the left hand side of the road when everyone else drives on the right? Why does cabbage taste so awful? Why does grandma take her teeth out at night? Why can't we eat flowers?

And our parents – because they want to be helpful and educational – give us answers, and we believe them. We take what they say. They are the founts of all knowledge, as far as we're concerned. They've been there, done it, got the wisdom.

It's only later that we find out that they said the first thing that came into their head, sounds believable, sometimes it was right sometimes it wasn't. Children don't know the difference. The trust we placed in our parents, and they just wanted us to stop asking impossible questions! As long as it sounded good, we'd believe it. How gullible we children were! Misplaced trust, misplaced faith.

We're going to see this morning that faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who loved us, died for us and rose again victorious for us is never misplaced.

I want us to read an account of someone who found that his faith was rewarded, not misplaced. Let's read of the faith of a Roman centurion, and we find it in Matthew's gospel, chapter 8 and verses 5 – 13. [Read]

We're going to look briefly at the people mentioned here – we're going to look at the faith of the centurion, the authority of Jesus, and then the warning to those who were there listening to and seeing what happened that day. **What faith! What authority! What a warning!**

In the chapters just previous to this, Jesus has been teaching those who were following him about the kingdom of God, and what it means to be a true follower of Christ.

At the beginning of Chapter 5 we read *‘when He saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside’*, this so he could teach them all.

In chapter 8:1 we read *‘When he came down from the mountainside, large crowds followed Him’*. The verses in between we refer to as the ‘Sermon on the Mount’. You’ll be glad to hear I don’t intend at this stage to give a summary of it! But Jesus is teaching whoever will listen – and there were many - about the kingdom of God. In the passage we read just now He arrives at the town of Capernaum, just north of the Sea of Galilee, which has become His ‘home base’ for the three years of His ministry.

1. Lets look firstly at the centurion. **What faith!**

Verse 5 says, *‘When Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him, asking for help. “Lord,” he said, “my servant lies at home paralysed and in terrible suffering.’*

This man was a Roman centurion. The Romans were hated by the Jews at that time because they were the occupying force, they oppressed and controlled the people of Israel at that time. He was a centurion, in charge of about 100 Roman soldiers. The Jews were expecting a King who would come in power to overthrow the Romans and who would free them from the oppression of the Romans. **This centurion** recognised the **real** King of the Jews, the One who came to bring their **salvation**. He came to Jesus.

Now, there were so many obstacles which could have stopped this man from coming to ask help from Jesus:

- his pride – a soldier with standing and responsibility, a respected job to do in the area, proud to be serving Caesar;
- self-sufficiency – he was a powerful man - should he be depending on the help of a **Jew**?
- language – would he know what to say?;
- culture – this could have stopped him, shouldn’t he have been relying on the tried and tested traditions of his **own** people? The centurion was a Gentile, not a Jew;
- what would the people think – ‘does anything good come from Rome? Why should this Roman come to **us** for help?’
- distance and time – too far to go, and any way he had a job to do, he just didn’t have the time;

None of these barriers blocked the centurion coming to Jesus. He came to Jesus with urgency. He had a need, or rather his servant did, and he came to Jesus for help. He knew where to go, he knew **who** could help him.

What about us? When we have a need, where do we go? Do we know who to turn to? How do we approach God? Do we come with urgency? Or do we fall at the hurdles – pride (we don't really need help); self-sufficiency (we can get through on our own); language (I don't know how to ask); culture (let's try other practical solutions first, see if they help); other people (what would they think if they knew I prayed?); distance and time (I can't get along today – too far, no time). What stops **us** from coming to Jesus when we have a need? Perhaps it's one of **these** things – perhaps it's something else. They are hurdles, but we must overcome them.

Whatever hurdles the centurion had to overcome, he **did**. He came to Jesus. He came to Jesus because no doubt he had heard of what Jesus had done as he had gone around Galilee. We read in chapter 4 verse 24 *'News about Jesus spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, the epileptics and the paralytics, and he healed them.'*

He heard what Jesus was doing, and **believed** He was the Son of God, he recognised who Jesus was. So he came to Jesus and said *'Lord'* (verse 6). In Luke's account of this event in chapter 7, he says that the centurion loved the Jewish nation and had built their synagogue – he recognised that the Jews had God's message of salvation. He came to Jesus and said *'Lord'*.

He came to Jesus with humility. Verse 7 *'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 ..."'*

We might not want visitors to come to our house because it's always in a mess! But the centurion feels he is not **worthy** for the Son of God to come under his roof, because that is who He is. The Jewish elders in Luke's account think he **is** worthy because of his kind treatment of the Jews and his kindness towards his own servant, but more importantly **Jesus** considers him worthy – he says straight away that he will go and heal the servant – no thought of 'this is only a Gentile, a Roman, an oppressor' – no, **all** are worthy of a visit from Jesus.

When we come to Jesus in prayer, do we come with humility? I think we have to strike a real balance here: Hebrews 4:16 says, *'Let us approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.'* We **can** approach God boldly, in confidence that He **wants** us to speak to him. We are God's adopted children – he wants us to approach him, to express our love for him in asking for his help. But we must also remember exactly **who it is we're approaching** – almighty God, who was and is and ever shall be, the One who paid the price for our salvation, all-powerful God.

Come to Jesus, come to God in confidence, but with awe and humility.

The centurion does – **he** comes with confidence. *'But just say the word, and my servant will be healed.'* Verse 8. *'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.'*

He recognises who Jesus is, he knows he is the Son of God as he claims to be, and because he is the Son of God he has authority over **all things** – more about that in a moment. The centurion has a limited amount of authority over his soldiers; he himself is a man under the authority of Caesar – he knows how it works, he knows that those in authority are to be obeyed.

All things are under the authority of God. The centurion recognises that Jesus has that authority – he just needs to say a word, and the illness of his servant will be gone. Jesus doesn't even need to go to the servant – *'.. just say the word, and my servant will be healed.'* What faith! Jesus says in verse 10, *'I tell you the truth, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith.'* Such great faith. JC Ryle in his commentary says that faith is a precious gift of God, and like all precious things, such faith is rare – that's why Jesus is astonished here. The centurion comes to Jesus for help, he comes with urgency, in humility but with great confidence in the authority and power of Jesus to answer his need. This is faith!

But of course faith is useless if it is placed in the wrong thing. If I have a migraine, and it's making me feel dizzy and nauseous, there's no point going to the cupboard and finding a plaster to put on my head! A plaster may be good for putting on cuts, helping the skin to heal, but it'll do nothing for my migraine.

2. I mentioned just now that the centurion places his trust in Jesus because Jesus has **all authority**. When sending out his disciples in Matthew chapter 28 and verse 18 he says, '*All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me.*'

All authority – not some authority, not just over the west, not just over Europe, not just over Christian countries, but over all the world. Do you believe that?

All authority – not just over nice people, not just over friendly people, not just over attractive people, but over horrible people, over unattractive people, over the most sinful even murderous people – over all people everywhere. Do you believe that?

All authority – not just over temporary illnesses, not just over colds, not just over headaches, but over cancer, over Parkinson's, over Multiple Sclerosis. Do you believe that?

The centurion did. He believes that Jesus has authority to heal his servant, the authority to say the word and his servant will be healed. With us, saying something may be completely different from doing something; but with Jesus saying and doing are one – he says the word and it is done. And in verse 18 of Matthew chapter 8 we read, '*.. his servant was healed at that very hour.*' Jesus said the word and the servant was healed.

We are privileged to have the Bible in its fullness now, the centurion didn't. We can now read in John's gospel, '*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*' God spoke a word, and creation came into being. In Colossians 1 and verse 16 it says of Jesus, '*By Him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth ..; all things were created by him and for him.*' Jesus is the Word of God, through him everything was created. **All authority** is given to him.

As we read through the New Testament we see Jesus at work with authority over all things – he heals the sick and dying, he frees the demon possessed, he saves those facing punishment and death, he even raises from the dead. He says a word and it happens. He spoke and the blind saw, the crippled jumped for joy. **What authority!** He has ultimate authority over all things. Why? Because he **is** the Son of God.

The people who saw his dealings with people and heard him teaching were amazed at his authority – for example we read in Matthew chapter 7:28, *‘When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority,’*

Even the winds and waves obeyed him – with a word he stilled the seas.

Jesus had authority over death – no-one else throughout history, as far as I know – has been able to lay down his life, and take it up again. What authority!

The other side of the coin is that Jesus also knows when **not** to exercise his authority – he could have said a word and saved himself from the Cross - all the suffering, the pain, the anguish. He could have spared himself all that torment with just one word – he could have stopped evil men conspiring against him – he had the authority. He said nothing, he remained silent. This is Jesus, the Son of God, *‘All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me.’*

Surely if we know Jesus, if we know who he is, if we know that all authority is given to him, this should encourage our faith, it should make us more confident, more expectant as we approach him in prayer. What effect does it have on our lives? Do we really **know** God? The centurion believed, he trusted, he had faith – what about us?

We’ve seen then the faith of the centurion – What faith! We’ve seen the authority of Jesus at work - What authority!

3. But I can’t leave this passage there. After commending the centurion for his strong faith, Jesus goes on to say in verse 11, *‘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.’*

This would have come as a hammer blow to the Jews. **What a warning!** to them, but also to us now. God had always been the God of Israel, they were his special people. Jesus lived amongst the Jews whilst on earth. He came to the Jews, he ministered to the Jews. The first shock was that Jesus accepted the faith of this Roman centurion – a non-Jew. What? The kingdom of God was to include Gentiles?

Jesus says in verse 10 that he had not seen such faith in Israel – a non-Jew outdoing Jews in believing **their** God? How could it be? What a shock to the Jews who were listening – this was **their** faith, **their** God.

But even worse was to come:

Jesus says, '*Many from the east and west will take their places at the feast*' the centurion is not just a one off – there will be **many** non-Jews welcomed into the kingdom of God.

This will have raised more than eye-brows, and I'm sure it will have started a lot of heated debate in the crowd as they listened to Jesus.

But Jesus isn't finished yet:

We read in verse 12, '*But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*' I think that there will have been a deadly silence to start with when they heard Jesus say this. "What do you mean, Jesus? Subjects of the kingdom thrown out? What do you mean? Do you **really** mean that some of us – some of God's own people – will be thrown out? How can that be? We are God's people – always have been, always will be!"

Even if they could accept that others would be included in the kingdom of God, they couldn't accept that some Jews **won't** be accepted. What a warning! But it's not the first time that Jesus has given this warning: Look at Matthew chapter 7 and verse 21, '*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.*' Only he who does the will of God – in other words trusts in the saving work of Jesus on the Cross and in his resurrection – only he will enter the kingdom of God.

I'm sure you know the parable of the two men recorded in chapter 7, verses 24 to 27: One man built his house on sand, the other on rock. When the rains and wind came, the house on the sand was destroyed, while the other house stood because it had its foundation on the rock. Build on the rock – have your faith in Jesus – and you will enter the kingdom of God.

Well, what about the rest? At the Men's Convention last month I learnt something new and startling – the single thing that Jesus is recorded as talking most about in the gospels, is what happens to those who do not put their trust in him as Lord and Saviour. As **Jesus** spoke about it a lot, we mustn't avoid it – it's easy to do.

They are going to hell. Into the darkness, a place where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. A place devoid of all light, because God is not there. A place with no love, because God is love, and he's not going to be there. A place of pain, because God is not there to heal. A place of weeping and gnashing of teeth, because God is not there to comfort.

What a warning to those who are not in the kingdom – those listening to Jesus that day couldn't assume they were in the kingdom because their people were God's people, not because they had followed the Jewish traditions. Likewise today we can't think we're in God's kingdom because our parents are. It's not because we come to church every week. It's not because we meet and talk to other Christians.

Only those who do the will of God the Father, only those who build their foundation on the Rock of God, on Jesus will be welcomed into the kingdom of God.

Are you trusting in Jesus as the only way to heaven? Do you trust in him as your Lord and Saviour? Then rejoice! Be full of joy! Be thankful to God! Because he has saved you from eternal darkness. What grace, what mercy. If he has done **that** for you, surely you can have faith in him for all other things. Rejoice!

Let's round this all off then. We've seen the power of faith – the Roman centurion coming to Jesus, with urgency but in humility, in confidence and expectation – **What faith!** He came with faith because he recognised that Jesus is the Son of God, and that he, Jesus has power and authority over all things in heaven and earth – **What authority!** Because Jesus has supreme authority we can – like the centurion – place our faith in Jesus. But **what a warning** to people – heaven is the place where we are heading **only** if we put our faith and trust in the One who has authority to save - Jesus, the only One who is able to get us there.

Romans chapter 10 says, *'If you confess with your mouth "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ... There is no difference between Jew and Gentile – the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."*