

Touched by Jesus- Centurion

The person whose life was touched and transformed by Jesus that we're going to look at today was not a Jew. This was significant because Jesus' entire ministry took place entirely within the physical boundaries of the Jewish nation. He was a man of authority and position. He was a Roman officer serving in the occupied land of God's people the Israelites. He was called a centurion.

Centurion: A Roman officer in command of a hundred men.

Who do you remember, in all the bible, who had his faith acknowledged and even bragged on probably the most? A prophet, Abraham. Joseph, David, Daniel, Peter, Paul?this Roman centurion.

1 When He had concluded all His sayings in the hearing of the people, He entered Capernaum. **2** A centurion's slave, who was highly valued by him, was sick and about to die. **3** When the centurion heard about Jesus, he sent some Jewish elders to Him, requesting Him to come and save the life of his slave. **4** When they reached Jesus, they pleaded with Him earnestly, saying, "He is worthy for You to grant this, **5** because he loves our nation and has built us a synagogue." **6** Jesus went with them, and when He was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to tell Him, "Lord, don't trouble Yourself, since I am not worthy to have You come under my roof. **7** That is why I didn't even consider myself worthy to come to You. But say the word, and my servant will be cured. **8** For I too am a man placed under authority, having soldiers under my command. I say to this one, 'Go!' and he goes; and to another, 'Come!' and he comes; and to my slave, 'Do this!' and he does it." **9** Jesus heard this and was amazed at him, and turning to the crowd following Him, He said, "**I tell you, I have not found so great a faith even in Israel!**" **10** When those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the slave in good health. Luke 7:1-10 (HCSB)

If you are a serious student of the bible, you will know or should know that Matthew's gospel also records this same event in the ministry of Jesus. There are some differences in the two accounts. Let's read Matthew's report of what happened.....

5 When He entered Capernaum, a centurion came to Him, pleading with Him, **6** "Lord, my servant is lying at home paralyzed, in terrible agony!" **7** "**I will come and heal him,**" He told him. **8** "Lord," the centurion replied, "I am not worthy to have You come under my roof. But only say the word, and my servant will be cured. **9** For I too am a man under authority, having soldiers under my command. I say to this one, 'Go!' and he goes; and to another, 'Come!' and he comes; and to my slave, 'Do this!' and he does it." **10** Hearing this, Jesus was amazed and said to those following Him, "**I assure you: I have not found anyone in Israel with so great a faith!** **11** I tell

you that many will come from east and west, and recline at the table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. **12** But the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” **13** Then Jesus told the centurion, “Go. As you have believed, let it be done for you.” And his servant was cured that very moment. Matt 8:5-13 (HCSB)

Believing that God’s Word is inerrant and thus believing that the gospels should perfectly compliment one another to give us a more complete picture of the life of Christ, let’s first clear up any apparent questions, inconsistencies or discrepancies..... Laying the two accounts on top of one another we actually get a more complete story. When Jesus arrived at Capernaum, the slave was of course already sick. The centurion heard that Jesus was in town so he first sent some Jewish elders to persuade Jesus to come heal his servant. The elders indicated that the centurion was worthy because he had been kind to the Jewish community, even building them a synagogue. Jesus agreed to go with them.

As Jesus came near the house, friends of the centurion came out to meet Jesus and delivered the message, “Lord, don’t trouble Yourself, since I am not worthy to have You come under my roof. **7** That is why I didn’t even consider myself worthy to come to You. But say the word, and my servant will be cured. **8** For I too am a man placed under authority, having soldiers under my command. I say to this one, ‘Go!’ and he goes; and to another, ‘Come!’ and he comes; and to my slave, ‘Do this!’ and he does it.”

Jesus continued to approach the house. Then the centurion himself came out and repeated the same words delivered by His friends. At that time, Jesus acknowledged the great faith of the centurion and the servant was healed.

Four rhetorical questions:

How did the centurion come by such great faith? Remember, he was a gentile foreigner and a tough soldier who had risen in rank and authority of the Roman army to the point of leading a hundred men. How could such a transformation take place? Had he observed the teaching and miracles of Jesus or, had he come to the place of such great faith by the testimony of others? Had his friends even his slaves testified and convinced him of who Jesus was? My indefinite conclusion is that the man’s faith was born and grew primarily on the reports and testimonies of his friends and slaves.

When Jesus acknowledged and affirmed the centurion’s faith saying “ **I assure you: I have not found anyone in Israel with so great a faith!** This was the eternal, omniscient Son of God speaking. I don’t believe He was just speaking of what His earthly eyes had seen. He may very well have been comparing the man’s faith to all of Israel for all time!

It would be real easy and even reasonable to assume that the centurion was just lazy or too full of self importance to come out ask Jesus Himself to heal his slave had Jesus not so profoundly, knowing the man's heart, revealed the depth and sincerity of his faith. We don't know this centurion's faith came about, but we know it was real.

Why did this man care so much about his slave? The answer to this question can be drawn from the answer to the first question: Faith, genuine faith changes a man's heart, not only toward God, but also toward all other human beings, even slaves. (New creation)

Why did the Jewish elders go to Jesus on behalf of the centurion?

Knowing that most of the elders of the Jews rejected and even hated Jesus by this time, our first assumption would be that they were acting out of political necessity. The centurion had done much for the Jewish community under his watch and they were obligated to return the favor by persuading the Healer to come heal the slave as requested.

On the other hand, we know that not all of the Jewish leaders, such as Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, rejected Christ. My assumption here is that at least a pocket of faith, true faith, had taken root in Capernaum as indicated by the "earnest plea" of these elders and remarkable faith of the centurion. Something was going on there in that region Capernaum and God was changing lives.

Was it more the power of human faith or the will and authoritative word of omnipotent Jesus that led to the servant being healed? Note: Often Jesus acknowledged a person's faith as He healed them.

52 "Go your way," Jesus told him. "Your faith has healed you." Mark 10:52 (HCSB)

I can assure you, it was and is God and God alone who heals. But, it is also quite obvious that God has chosen to cooperate with human faith to do most of His work on earth. It is God's plan and purpose on earth to propagate faith through His love action leading men to humbly approach His throne in times of need.

I'm quite sure that God is able and willing to do much more than our meager, sporadic faith will ever likely lead us to seek and pursue. He is waiting and ready to move, change, strengthen and heal, but awaits the effectual, fervent prayers of faith.

One more encounter regarding a centurion is worthy of our observation.....Jesus on the cross at the moment of His death....

50 Jesus shouted again with a loud voice and gave up His spirit. **51** Suddenly, the curtain of the sanctuary was split in two from top to bottom; the earth quaked and the rocks were split. **52** The tombs also were opened and many bodies of the saints who had gone to their rest were raised. **53** And they came out of the tombs after His resurrection, entered the holy city, and appeared to many. **54** When the centurion and those with him, who were guarding Jesus, saw the earthquake and the things that had happened, they were terrified and said, "This man really was God's Son!"
Matt 27:50-54 (HCSB)

We can be **Touched by Jesus:**

Have faith- believe/trust God. The centurion's faith was not self-serving, convenient, spur of the moment faith. It was the real thing. This is evidenced by his unusual concern for his servant.

Faith is necessary for salvation.

8 For by grace you are saved through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God's gift—
9 not from works, so that no one can boast. Eph 2:8-9 (HCSB) And.....

6 Now without faith it is impossible to please God, for the one who draws near to Him must believe that He exists and rewards those who seek Him. Heb 11:6 (HCSB)

Faith is not something acquired through birth. It is born and nurtured only through frequent encounters with the Son of God.

Seek the Lord- It truly was astounding that this centurion had so much faith in Christ, but I think it was also significant that he did come out and meet Jesus. Jesus knew his faith was genuine, but for his own sake and the sake of others, it was important that he did move toward and seek to meet Christ. Remember the demons of hell believe and tremble.

You and I must seek the Lord. We must move toward Him. It is common instruction in the Old Testament as well as the new.

6 Seek the Lord while He may be found; call to Him while He is near. Isaiah 55:6 (HCSB)

26 From one man He has made every nation of men to live all over the earth and has determined their appointed times and the boundaries of where they live, **27** so that they might seek God, and perhaps they might reach out and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us. Acts 17:26-27 (HCSB)

Faith leads to confession “This man really was God’s Son!” Whether this was the same centurion or not, that was a very risky thing to say. It is reasonable to conclude that this centurion didn’t come about this conviction that Jesus really was God’s on a whim. It was likely decided upon through observation, interaction and growing faith.

This centurion boldly proclaimed with conviction the very words and idea that got Jesus crucified. He claimed to be the Son of God. He claimed to be equal with God. He claimed to be God.

This centurion did what every truly born again believer should be doing, proclaiming that Jesus is God’s Son!

14 What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith, but does not have works? Can his faith save him? James 2:14 (HCSB)

Inarguably, we are saved by grace through faith alone. But if one has been saved more than a few hours there must be a growing list of signs, evidences, and works that prove the faith is genuine.

This is the message of faith that we proclaim: **9** 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. **10** With the heart one believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth one confesses, resulting in salvation. Romans 10:8b-10 (HCSB)