

Great Faith in a Great Savior

Call to Worship: Psalm 92

1st Scripture: Luke 7:1-10

2nd Scripture: Matthew 8:5-13

Introduction

We have seen last time that our Lord's teachings were generally sandwiched between many miraculous signs and wonders that He had performed, which had served to authenticate His teachings. His power over every aspect of life, served to affirm His ability to provide the eternal life that He proclaimed could be found in Him, and in Him alone. And so, it is no surprise then that the Sermon on the Mount itself, which proclaimed the true nature of all who are in the Kingdom of God, in contradistinction to the impotent teaching and example of the Scribes and Pharisees, was surrounded by a flood of miraculous healings performed by our Lord.

Last time, we considered our Lord's healing of a leper, when He had come down from the mountain, with His disciples and a large multitude following Him. This morning, Matthew fasts forward a bit, providing us with another sign of attestation, which our Lord had performed when He had arrived at Capernaum. And here, we will see again, another glorious attestation of the power and glory of Christ, as He graciously deals with a Gentile centurion, whose beloved servant is mortally ill.

But, before we do this, I want to address a very important matter concerning the recording of this event, when comparing Matthew's account to Luke's, who also addresses the same event, but from a bit of a different angle. I want to spend time doing this, because sadly, the faith of some has wavered over such matters, and non-Christians will highlight these types of differences, suggesting that the Bible contradicts itself, when in fact such differences actually serve to further substantiate the glorious unity and integrity of the Scriptures.

I. Comparing the Accounts of Matthew and Luke

We read Luke's account in our first Scripture reading, and some of you may have noticed something that popped out, when we just read the same account here in Matthew. For starters,

Matthew includes information at the end of the text (verses 11-12), which being particularly relevant for his Jewish audience (as we will see, when we come to these verses), that Luke does not include, as he is writing to a gentile audience. And then, you will find that Luke includes information in the first five verses of his recording, which is not included in Matthew's account, which would have had particular relevance for Luke's Gentile audience.

Again, it is important to remember that the biblical authors, being directly inspired by the Holy Spirit, were not overly concerned with getting every piece of information out, so much as they were concerned with getting out every piece of *relevant* information, which served their primary purpose in writing their respective Books/Letters unto the edification of their respective audiences. And so, to this end, while their information had to be accurate (of course), not every detail was required, and in fact, giving every detail could have even detracted from their main purpose at times. The Gospel accounts are not biographical sketches of the life of Jesus. That is not their purpose. They are revelational in nature, meant to convey specific truths that God had deemed fit to accomplish His will in His people.

The difference between the two accounts, which one who is not acquainted with this purpose of the Scriptures, and who doesn't have a proper understanding of the use of biblical language, will attempt to declare to be contradictory, involves *who* it is that literally comes to Jesus with the request. Notice, in our text, here in Matthew, we are told in verse 5, "Now when Jesus entered Capernaum, a *centurion* came to Him, pleading with Him..." And then in verse 8, responding to Jesus's willingness to come, we are told, "The *centurion* answered and said, 'Lord, I am not worthy that you should come under my roof...etc.'" Now, in Luke's account, we are told in chapter 7:3, "So when he (the centurion) heard about Jesus, *he sent elders of the Jews* to Him, pleading with Him to come and heal His servant." And then, when Jesus was "not far from (his) house, the centurion sent friends to Him, saying, 'Lord, do not trouble Yourself, for I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof...etc'" (vs. 6).

And so, what's the linguistic difference here? Luke, speaking to his gentile audience, goes out of his way, seeking to emphasize that the centurion actually sent representatives on his behalf, to speak with Jesus, while Matthew, doesn't specifically mention the representatives, simply noting what the centurion had requested of Jesus, as if, direct. Is this then some

significant contradiction between the two authors? No, not at all. Luke, again, speaking to his gentile audience, wanted to add an additional important fact, which Matthew did not see the necessity of including for his audience. And in order for Luke to do this, he had to specifically include the details of Jewish elders going to Jesus on behalf of the centurion. And here is the important piece of information which Luke had added. In verses 4-5 (again, of Luke 7), Luke adds, “And when they (that is, the Jewish elders) came to Jesus, they begged Him earnestly, saying that the one for whom He should do this was deserving, ‘for he loves our nation, and has built us a synagogue.’” And so, Luke notes this additional plea, put forth by the Jewish elders, in recognition of the gentile centurion’s kindness to the Jews, as an additional attempt to persuade Him to do what He was not yet normally doing, that is, ministering to gentiles.

And so, I only note this to highlight a great example of where you will see a different angle being used by two different authors, of the same event, without fudging the truth, while simply giving what is necessary for their audience and purpose. Matthew doesn’t mention the specific representatives involved, but he has no need to, and it doesn’t affect the main purpose of his narrative in any negative way at all. His purpose, addressing his Jewish audience is accomplished. Nothing takes away from or minimizes the integrity of the narrative. Matthew is simply highlighting exactly what the centurion did, without including the representation. And indeed, it is such differences as these, in the midst of many identical statements (even within this same text), that we actually further affirm the authenticity of the integrity of the Scriptures, rather than any unnecessary, dishonest contradictions. The Gospels are not cookie-cutter accounts. Together, they give us a glorious picture of the life and ministry of Christ, showing enough similarities to reveal consistency, while highlighting unique descriptions of different angles which suit the purposes of each Book, addressed to each particular audience. The combination of identical and unique statements addressing same events, and the omitting or including of other events throughout their Books, actually does better to affirm and authenticate the integrity of their unity, rather than detract from it.

II. Great Faith in a Great Savior

“Now when Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to Him, pleading with Him, saying, “Lord, my servant is lying at home paralyzed, dreadfully tormented” (vs. 5-6). Now, as we have noted last time, when the Lord healed the leper, we find here, again, a profound situation that gives us insight into the great extent unto which the Kingdom of God expands. Here, we get a brief taste of its expansion beyond Israel and into the gentile world. Even as the leper was perpetually unclean and not permitted to approach the people of God because of his uncleanness, this centurion was a gentile, and generally gentiles, who were also unclean and uncircumcised, were also not permitted to have fellowship with Jews. And yet, both managed to lay hold of the Jewish Messiah, albeit, in different ways. And to this end, we begin to see that *physical* uncleanness is not going to be the forbidden factor which keeps people out of the Kingdom of God. For, as we have seen in the Sermon on the Mount, God is not ultimately concerned with outward appearances and the condition of the physical body, so much, as He is concerned about the heart. This is greatly affirmed by who Jesus embraces throughout the course of His ministry.

Being a very kind and humble man, which was extremely rare for a centurion, who being a well-paid commander over a hundred Roman soldiers, was generally proud and bully-ish, this centurion honors the Jewish laws and (as we have seen in Luke’s account) rather sends Jewish elders to plead on his behalf, for the sake of his greatly suffering, tormented and dying young servant. And the Jewish elders were glad to do this, because this man was very kind to the Jews. He had a love for the Jewish nation, and even had a synagogue built for them. To this end, the Jewish elders added weight to the centurion’s plea, showing that even though he was not a Jew, he was a good and worthy man. And profoundly, Jesus’s ministry, which was to be primarily and firstly directed to the Jews (at this point), immediately expresses His willingness to go to the man’s home, to heal his dying servant (vs. 7).

Now, in Luke’s account, we find that Jesus had gone with the messengers, but when He was nearing the centurion’s house, something absolutely profound happened, that even amazed the Lord Jesus Christ, Himself. We are told that the centurion, understanding that Jesus was nearing his house, sent some of his friends out to stop the Lord in His tracks. Now, why would

he do this? The Lord was almost there. And again, this man was a well paid, well respected, ruler over one hundred Roman soldiers. But, here is his profound message to the Lord. First, in Luke's account, we have the words, "Lord (note: he, who could very easily have received the title of "Lord" from others, because of his position, places himself beneath the authority of Jesus, calling Him "Lord")... do not trouble yourself..." "I don't even want to add the slightest burden to your ministry. Especially, since I am a gentile, this might prove some form of a hindrance to Your ministry. You don't even have to come into my house." And then, Matthew and Luke both add, "Lord, I am not worthy that You should come under my roof. But only speak a word, and my servant will be healed. For I also am a man under authority, having soldiers under me. And I say to this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and to another, 'Come,' and he comes; and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it'" (vs. 8-9).

What a profound act of faith on the part of this gentile centurion! And what a profound act of humility, considering his background and position! This man understood something, so profound, that the people of God, who had the oracles of God and the temple worship...etc, could not grasp. He had insight into the power and glory of Christ like no other. He understood that Jesus's power was truly divine and not dependent upon His presence even. He knew that Jesus was a Man with authority, not unlike himself, but to a far greater extent even, over the spiritual and angelic realm. That's why he states what he states here. He understood the "order of command," and how seriously every Roman would have taken the responsibility to carry out the expectations and commands of his superior. And if that chain was virtually unbreakable for the Romans, how much more would it be secure in the angelic realm. But again, most profoundly, is that he understood, confessed, and took the "faith risk" of believing that Jesus had such command over the spiritual realm. So confident was he, that when Jesus was virtually at the man's door, out of respect for the Lord, and out of recognition of his own unworthiness, he pled with him not even to come into his house, confident that all the Lord had to do was to give the mere order, and the centurion's servant would be fully healed.

Further affirming the real and full humanity of Jesus, we are told in the text that Jesus *marveled* (He Himself experienced the real and sincere emotion of amazement) when He saw this man's faith. Notice what we are told in verse 10: "When Jesus heard it, He marveled, and

said to those who followed, “Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!” What a profound irony! This gentile man had exercised a level of faith in Jesus that Jesus had not found in all of Israel! None, from among His own people, the natural people of God, who had all of the blessings of God upon them, had exercised such a faith in Jesus! Even His closest disciples, as we see repeatedly throughout the Gospels, during the life and ministry of Jesus, who had walked along with Him, seeing His miracles and performing miracles themselves in His Name, had, up to this point, been incapable of grasping this level of an understanding of the power, authority and glory of Christ. We recall those repeated words of our Lord, to His disciples, “Oh you of little faith,” as they continued to struggle with doubts about Him. But this man understood, and his actions affirmed his words, to the great potential risk of losing his beloved young servant. And Jesus marveled over his faith.

And of course, the man’s servant was healed at that very hour, as we are told in verse 13. Speaking to the centurion, through his representative friends, He states, “Go your way; and as you have believed, so let it be done for you.” And so, the servant was healed. Great faith had met a Great savior, and the centurion’s plea was heard and granted! And a key to the gentile world was already being produced, which would lead to unlocking the gate that once separated them from God, bringing in a great influx of people from every tribe, tongue and nation, into the Kingdom of God, especially during the time of the Apostles, as recorded in the Book of Acts.

III. The Significance of Verses 11-12 to Matthew’s Gospel

Finally, let us briefly address verses 11-12, which Luke does not mention, but which finds great significance in Matthew’s Gospel, especially as he is primarily addressing a Jewish audience. To His Jewish audience, after having marveled over the faith of the Centurion, the Lord adds these sobering words, “And I say to you that many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

What frightening, sobering, and yet, necessary words, spoken by our Lord here, completely contradicting the whole notion, that there was any salvific advantage to simply being a natural born, ethnic Jewish individual. And again, this falls right in line with His comments

and teachings, given in the Sermon on the Mount, where He spoke about the righteousness of the Pharisees and Scribes, as being insufficient to bring one into the Kingdom of God. What then is our Lord's main point here? Namely, that there will be many people outside of the confines of Israel; many, formerly alienated, heathen, gentiles, who will receive the blessings given through God's covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, being welcomed into the Kingdom of heaven, while, there will also be many who have ethnically descended from Abraham, who will not, but instead, will be cast into hell (outer darkness), where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. And so, in the light of this gentile centurion's great faith, Jesus here brings out what the Apostle Paul greatly elaborates upon in Galatians and Romans, showing that the true, redeemed Israel of God, is not made up of those who are mere *physical* descendants of Abraham, but of those who actually share the same genuine faith of Abraham, in the true promised Seed of Israel, namely, the Lord Jesus Christ. In other words, the Kingdom of God has no ultimate association with *physical* circumcision or ethnic Israel, but rather the circumcision of the heart, and the true *spiritual* Israel of God. Again, this gets back to the heart of our Lord's startling teaching in the Sermon on the Mount, and the great emphasis of God's concern about the nature of the motives of the heart, and not mere religiosity and outward traditions. This is precisely what both the Lord's Jewish audience, and Matthew's Jewish audience desperately needed to hear. And ultimately, it is what we all need to hear, for that matter. Religion doesn't save. Christ saves, because only Christ can deal with the guilt and penalty of sin, while providing all that is needed to bring about the type of fruit that is required, to fulfill the commands given in the Sermon on the Mount.

III. Conclusive Applications

1) Brethren, one of the great encouragements that this text ought to bring to us, is to grasp the power and glory of Christ in His ability to answer our prayers *today*. Jesus is God, the Son. And He, who could heal leprosy, make the blind see and the deaf hear; He, who could raise up the paralyzed and the dead; He who could control the wind and the waves with His voice, and here, even heal from afar, having angelic beings at His beck and call, is the same all-sovereign, all-knowing God and Christ that is actively involved in our lives. We are in union with this

Christ, and He hears and loves us. He is not so distant from us that He cannot intervene in any and every area of our lives. He is a *very* present help, in times of trouble. And so, like the Centurion, let us understand that the bodily presence of Christ is not necessary for Him to hear us, and to accomplish everything that needs to be accomplished in our lives.

2) Often times, the people whom we might think are the lowest and simplest among Christians, have the greatest faith. The Jews had the oracles of God. They had the temple and all of the bells and whistles of Judaistic religion. They were circumcised, and often rigorously kept the Mosaic ceremonial laws; they maintained a life of pursuing only what was considered legally clean, and yet, this gentile centurion had a far greater grasp, understanding, and faith in the Messiah, when He had arrived. He understood the glory of Christ in a way that no Israelite did. This man had a great faith. And because his great faith was in a great Savior, the power and glory of Christ filled his home, without the Lord even stepping foot into it. Two notable qualities which this centurion evidenced, was a profound quality of humility, and a genuine, proved love for the people of God. And I believe that those who possess these two things: Great humility and great love for God's people, are those who have the greatest understanding and faith in the Lord, regardless of the quantity of spiritual gifts or abilities they may have. [*His self-view vs. elders]

3) If you are outside of Christ, whatever your natural situation and circumstance might be; whether you were raised in a religious home, whether everyone in your family line for a thousand generations were Christians, understand that physical birth and contextual privilege alone will not grant you salvation, in any sense whatsoever. You must have your own personal faith and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, as your Savior and Lord. You cannot get to heaven on the apron strings of mom's faith, or on the coattails of dad's faith. You must repent and believe into this Jesus, for yourself, receiving Him as your Lord and Savior, if you are to be saved. Don't be deceived by religious privileges. They will only add to your guilt, if you don't come to Christ yourself. Jesus said that there would be many physical descendants of Abraham who would be cast into outer darkness. You can say the same thing about descendants of Christians. I weep over the thought that there are many individuals who have been raised in Christian homes, who will be separated from their parents and cast into hell, but it's true, nonetheless.

[The Gospel!!!]

Amen!!!

Benediction: Jude 1:24-25