

# The Amazement of Jesus

*The Real Jesus: Emotional Life*

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**Bible Text:** Matthew 8:5-13; Mark 6:1-11

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## **First Presbyterian Church**

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Now are beginning today a new series that will take us through the rest of this month and into the month of October and you will notice from the order of service that this series is entitled “The Real Jesus: The Emotional Life of our Savior.” And to begin this series we are going to read from God’s Word, first of all, in Matthew chapter eight and you will find that on page 813 of the pew Bible or 1169 for our children who have their children’s Bible. And then a second passage from the gospel according to Mark chapter six which is on page 841 or, stretching your counting, page 1220. And it may never have crossed your mind that an order of service has several functions and one of its useful functions today might be to keep your order of service in the Mark passage after we have read it and we will be turning to that a little later in the message this morning.

So let us hear God’s Word from the gospel according to Matthew chapter eight and verse five.

When he entered Capernaum, a centurion came forward to him, appealing to him, “Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, suffering terribly.”

And he said to him, “I will come and heal him.”

But the centurion replied, “Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof, but only say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I too am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. And I say to one, ‘Go,’ and he goes, and to another, ‘Come,’ and he comes, and to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and he does it.”

When Jesus heard this, he marveled and said to those who followed him, “Truly, I tell you, with no one in Israel have I found such faith. I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

And to the centurion Jesus said, “Go; let it be done for you as you have believed.” And the servant was healed at that very moment.<sup>1</sup>

And then in Mark’s gospel chapter six, page 841 or 1220 in the children’s Bible, Mark chapters six and verse one.

He went away from there and came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him. And on the Sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astonished, saying, “Where did this man get these things? What is the wisdom given to him? How are such mighty works done by his hands? Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us?” And they took offense at him.

And Jesus said to them, “A prophet is not without honor, except in his hometown and among his relatives and in his own household.”

And he could do no mighty work there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and healed them. And he marveled because of their unbelief.<sup>2</sup>

Some of you who are especially interested in political conventions either of the Republican kind or the Democratic kind or those of you who have been watching both in the last couple of weeks, some of you will be able to tell me when it was that at these conventions the organizers started bringing to the platform the wife of the presidential candidate. I suspect it has happened only in our media conscious generation and certainly to an outsider it is a rather peculiar reality.

I am not wired to see the Duke of Edinburgh coming on television to tell me what his wife Elizabeth is like. And those of us who are older I am fairly sure are not wired for such moments. So why do they come and why, in some ways, at least in the view of some, why is the key speech actually what the wife says? Because of this strange paradox that although we know far more about our political candidates than people did in the past, although we spend far more money or they spend far more money letting us know all about themselves, the truth of the matter is at the end of the day, the ordinary voter is sitting there asking himself: What is he really like? With all this massive information that I have about him, what I really want to know is what he is really like.

Pardon a sense of doubt in the matter, but I can’t imagine that many of us would be encouraging our wives to appear on television and say to the nation, “Tell them, honey, exactly what I am like.”

But we do have this first. We have a need, really, except it is a deeply human need. Without it there can never be any real trust. We do want to know what people are really

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 8:5-13.

<sup>2</sup> Mark 6:1-6.

like. And those of you who have met famous people and ever just done a little name dropping, as those who meet famous people usually do, you have basked in the reflected glory of people saying to you, “Tell me what she is really like. What was he really like?”

These are famous people. But their fame pales into insignificance by comparison with the name of the Lord Jesus. There are no groups of people even at political conventions who will chant as we have chanted this morning. And some of us have chanted hundreds of times. Some of us, perhaps, even thousands of times the name of the Lord Jesus Christ declaring him and the Apostles’ Creed and singing about him in songs of praise, taking his name upon our lips as we read his Word.

What if somebody on Wednesday afternoon says to you, “You are a Christian, aren’t you?” And you say, “Yes” and they say to you, “What is Jesus really like?” And you say, “Well, he is the Savior and he is the Lord.”

And you have probably got friends like this. They will say, “Yes, but what is he really, really like?” And to put it that way in the context of political conventions and the context of saying the creed does rather underline for us the extent to which we can know a great deal about somebody without, in a sense, having a sense that we really know them on the inside.

One of the things we are going to explore together in these few weeks as we think about the emotional life of our Savior, the inner life of our Savior are those statements in the gospels, some of them outside of the gospels where we are drawn in, as it were, to the very heart of our Lord Jesus Christ and windows are opened, as it were, into his soul. We hear what he says, but we also are told what he felt, what he experienced even the emotions he had on certain moments in his life and incidents in the gospel.

And the aim is not psychological. The aim is very simple, that we would share Paul’s experience when he says, “I want to know Christ.”

All the aspiration of the famous prayer of Richard of Chichester, “For these three things I pray: to see thee more clearly, to love thee more dearly and follow thee more nearly, day by day.”

And so we are going to begin where Matthew begins in speaking about the emotional experience of our Lord Jesus Christ and where Mark also speaks about precisely the same emotion: amazement, surprise, astonishment, being touched with a sense of the unexpected and having a sense of wonder before what is happening.

And interestingly, in both of these instances as we know, in fact, from the whole of the gospel story, in both of these instances, a synagogue is involved {?} that this Roman centurion so loved the Jewish people that he had built them a synagogue in Capernaum. And now he is coming to Jesus for help. And then in Mark’s gospel the people, like ourselves, with whom Jesus went to synagogue worship again and again and again in his

home village of Nazareth and how there, as well as in Capernaum, Jesus had an experience of amazement, of surprise, but of a very different flavor all together.

First of all here in Matthew chapter eight it is Jesus' encounter with the Roman centurion in Capernaum. Those of you who have been to both Nazareth and Capernaum, at least today, would not be surprised, dare I say it, that Jesus moved to Capernaum. It is like having a house at the shore or having a house in the mountains by comparison with having a house in the middle of Columbia, South Carolina in the middle of the summer. It is a delightful and beautiful place. And there, as he moves there, he settles, of course. This is the area from which some of his disciples have come. And he is going to minister in this area on that side of the Sea of Galilee up to the north.

And you do wonder why should there be a Roman centurion in that little village. And the answer is because it was a prosperous place. And surprise, surprise, governments are interested in taxation and the Roman centurion is there to make sure that the prosperity of Capernaum is guarded in part for the sake of the Roman government and it is an important part of border country. And we know all about securing the borders and so the Roman centurion is there with his soldiers in order to safe guard this area for the sake of the Roman Empire. And he is obviously a very remarkable man. He loves the Jewish people, which, itself, is astonishing for a Roman centurion.

I actually have a Hebrew professor who disliked the Jewish people and loved the Arabs. But for a Roman centurion to have this affection for this marginalized and subjugated people and actually build them a synagogue is a truly remarkable thing. So there is something admirable about this man and there is also something powerful about this man. Neither the quality of his character nor the authority of the Roman Empire can solve the problem he has. And the situation he has is that his servant, possibly his son, but I think more likely his servant, his servant has had some kind of paralytic attack, is desperately ill and the Roman centurion feels absolutely helpless. We know from the gospels as a whole that he sent some of the elders of the synagogue with him. He was in good relationships to deal with Jesus in the hope that Jesus would be able to save his paralyzed servant. And the situation is really desperate. And he asked Jesus to heal the servant.

Jesus may indeed, as the English Standard Version suggests, say, "I will come and heal him." It is possible that what Jesus is actually saying here is, "Do you expect that I will actually come and heal him and enter the house of a Gentile dog no matter what he has done for the local synagogue?"

You remember that later on in Matthew's gospel he seems to hand off a Canaanite woman in the same way as a kind of test of where she really is. Is she going to hold on to Jesus with real faith? Or is she going to be put off? And this man's response impresses Jesus profoundly. Indeed, it surprises him. It causes wonder. It causes amazement and astonishment.

And you can see why this is, because this Roman centurion—just think about it—think about his position in society, this Roman centurion who has done so much for the Jewish Church of his day says to Jesus: “I am unworthy for you to come into my house.”

He is the kind of fellow you would want a church. You want a church full of people like this, wouldn't you? How different this would be from how some churches are where those who provide physical blessings for the congregation expect that they will be regarded as especially worthy in the congregation. And this man is the very antithesis of this. He recognizes his unworthiness to have Jesus in his house, a Roman centurion.

Now I don't know very much about the American military except the blessing of meeting many of them who pass through Fort Jackson and in other places, but I don't think we teach our military to feel unworthy, do we? That wouldn't be our way. And so this is a really surprising, impressive thing. And Jesus takes a deep breath as he watches this and then, in addition to this, we shouldn't miss this, that the centurion says in verse eight:

“Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof.”<sup>3</sup>

He not only recognizes that he is unworthy, he recognizes Jesus' dignity. Now it might be stretching a point to say, “Well, he clearly recognizes Jesus' deity,” but what Matthew is wanting to impress upon us is that this Roman centurion calls Jesus Lord. He calls Jesus Lord. Do we have any idea the significance of that? Who was a Roman centurion under oath to call Lord? Caesar is Lord. There is a sense in which these words actually endanger this centurion's very military commission. And so this is an astonishing statement where this man senses himself to be unworthy and yet seems to have such a clear view of Jesus' dignity. You remember that the Christians were martyred for refusing to say Caesar is Lord. And instead saying Jesus is Lord. They were called on in public to deny that Jesus is Lord and to confess that Caesar is Lord. And here is this man who precisely because he is in the military is compelled to recognize Caesar as Lord. And he is coming to the Lord Jesus and he is recognizing his identity and his dignity.

But, perhaps, the most intriguing thing is this. He feels himself to be unworthy, he recognizes Jesus' dignity, but he has a remarkable understanding of Jesus' authority. Look at what he says in verse nine.

“For I too...”<sup>4</sup>

Now if you have got a New International Version I am pretty sure that is not there, but I can assure you it is there in the text of Matthew. Too, meaning just like you. Just like you, I am a man under authority. And what is the result? Because he is a Roman centurion under Caesar's authority when he says, “Go, you go. And when he says, “Come,” you come. So you see what he is saying about Jesus. He has recognized the source of Jesus' authority. He is saying, “I have recognized that you, like me a centurion, you are an emissary of ultimate authority, but your ultimate authority is not to be found in

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<sup>3</sup> Matthew 8:8.

<sup>4</sup> Matthew 8:9.

Rome. Your ultimate authority is at the throne room of God in glory. And so I understand that if I can say to a man go and he goes and another come and he comes, then by your word you have all authority.”

Isn't it interesting? This is the way Matthew's gospel ends? And here is one of the first people to understand what it means that Jesus has all authority in heaven and on earth. And all he needs to say is go or to be healed. He doesn't even need to come to the house. It is a glorious, glorious understanding. Yes, limited within this period of the gospel narrative, but what an understanding of the Lord Jesus and what faith to trust him in this way. And that is what opens Jesus' eyes, as it were, in amazement and wonderment, in astonishment and surprise.

He says, “I haven't found anything like this in all Israel. All these weeks, months I have been teaching and preaching and doing mighty works. I have never seen anything like this whatsoever.” And it touches him inwardly, profoundly. He is surprised.

What does it mean to be surprised? It means that something happens that you were never given any indications could happen. You could never have worked this out by thinking things through. And so it is a surprise and he has this marvelous surprise at the way in which the Roman centurion has grasped what others have not grasped.

But, you know, I am pretty sure there is something else in this. Later on in Matthew's gospel when Peter confesses Jesus as the Christ you remember what Jesus says. He says, “Peter, you have been with me all this time. I want you to understand that flesh and blood doth not reveal this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.”

Now he doesn't say that here, but clearly Jesus here understands that if this Roman centurion has grasped something of his own unworthiness and of Jesus' identity and authority and ability to save and to transform life, then the only possible explanation is nothing that he could have calculated from history, but that his heavenly Father has opened this Roman centurion's eyes. And the wonderment, the surprise is that for not just about horizontal things. It is the surprise of the Lord Jesus Christ that has been given to him by his loving heavenly Father. Jesus isn't a statue. You are not a block of ivory of granite. He is living in relationship with his heavenly Father.

What does an earthly father want to do? Here is one of the delights of the an earthly father, to be able to surprise his children and to fill his children with that beautiful sense of delight that makes them look into the father's eyes and say, “You are the greatest dad in the world.” Jesus feels that.

I remember—my memory of these things is not always accurate, but I think this one is accurate—I remember the year we first bought a house and those of you who are trying to do that or have done it in the past or are doing it know that is the time when you need to learn how to budget. And we budgeted to the last pound note or in those days, pre dollars. Nowadays one dollar 60. We budgeted to the last pound note with extraordinary discipline. That year I bought one book, just one book. But at the end of it, when all the

sums had been done, there was money in the bank. And we have just the two, our two oldest boys where then, I think, five and four. And we went to the bicycle shop without them knowing it and we bought them each a bicycle. We put the bicycles in the back of our car, we covered the bicycles over with our traveling rug and I will never forget the moment when we said to them, “Come out and see this,” and we opened the—what do you call the back of a car in Scotland? I have almost forgotten—and there was this traveling rug. I never felt so much of a magician in all my life. And I thought they probably felt it was more milk. And then removed the traveling rug.

I have gone a long way in life on the surprised smiles of pleasure on these little boys’ faces. I should draw a curtain over what happened to the bikes and to them as they learned to use them in the days that followed, but that is a father’s pleasure, isn’t it, to give those. Apparently there was nothing in me that would have led them to expect new bikes that year.

And this is the Father giving his beloved Son the loveliest prize. And he feels it. And he says it is even more than that. He says, “This is one of the signs my heavenly Father is giving to me that they are going to come from the east and the west and they are going to sit in the kingdom.”

What a beautiful, beautiful moment that Jesus was surprised with pleasure in the love of his heavenly Father. And it, therefore, makes the second passage in Mark chapter six such a stark contrast, doesn’t it? If we turn over there to Mark chapter six. And now we are not in Capernaum which Jesus had, as it were, made his base of operations, we are now with Jesus back in Nazareth, his hometown. And not only in Nazareth, but we are on the sabbath day. It is Saturday in Nazareth and Jesus has gone to the synagogue. There are the people, just like us, you know. You see them every week. He hasn’t been there for some time. And you expect as when people come out to see you what are you... and great things about.

And then we are told that they were astonished. It is actually a different verb, but when they heard him, many were astonished. But, you see, in this astonishment, this emotion there is a piece of dirt has got in to this emotion here. There is a bit of dirt in the mechanism. There is a knot being tied here. And you see this rapid series of questions they ask.

“Where did this man get these things? What is the wisdom given to him? How are such mighty works done by his hands?”<sup>5</sup>

Isn’t that interesting? Carpenters hands.

“Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary.”<sup>6</sup>

Perhaps Joseph has died.

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<sup>5</sup> Mark 6:2.

<sup>6</sup> Mark 6:3.

“...and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us?”<sup>7</sup>

This is just your next door neighbor. Well, your next door neighbor may not have this bundle of children, but this is your next door neighbor in Nazareth. Who does he think he is? And the amazing thing for all the power of his teaching they are astonished at his teaching. I mean this is way beyond anything you and I ordinarily experience. There is something absolutely overwhelming about Jesus’ teaching. It is so fresh. It is so authentic. It seems to come with the authority of God himself and that is evident by the fact that he not only speaks this word as he teaches the Bible to them, but his Word has power to transform life, even to change people’s physical lives, to bring comfort to the distressed and sight to the blind and hearing to the deaf and cleansing to the lepers and new life. And he has been doing all this. But they won’t have him. They have known him all these years, but now that they have begun to see who he really is, the truth is coming out. And they are resistant to the work of God and they stumble and take offense and the tragedy is all of them are saying here, “We know him.” And not one single one of them really did know him.

That would be almost unbelievable to us if we didn’t have experience of the churches of the western world, wouldn’t it? I mean it really would be. How could this possibly happen? And yet you and I, we have seen churches where people have heard the teaching of Jesus, seen the transformative power of Jesus in the lives of others and have stubbornly resisted. And the wonder is these people kept going to the synagogue because they were going to see him out of the place. That is what they were doing. It is just overwhelming considering the privileges that they had had and even felt in themselves. They were astonished at his teaching.

And so when Mark tells us that he is rejected at Nazareth we read that he could do no mighty work there, verse five of Mark chapter six.

“...except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and healed them.”<sup>8</sup>

That doesn’t mean he had lost his power. That means he was living in harmony with the Father’s plan that since these people had despised all that he had shown them, the time had come to show them no more. That is evident because Mark makes it very clear there were a few people whose lives he transformed. And the thing is: His Father’s plan must have been tremendously painful to him. He marveled because of their unbelief, amazement, surprise. And yet coming in two radically different flavors, here in Jesus’ life and heart. The surprise of pleasure because of the love gift of his heavenly Father, what he was doing in the Roman centurion’s life and the pained surprise that there was no village in the country. There has never been a village in entire human history that has had such privileges as the village of Nazareth had. And yet they rejected him, pushed him out in unbelief, pleasure and pain.

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Mark 6:5.



Now what do we learn from this? Well, we can learn so much from this, but let me just point out one or two things this morning. Do you see that our Savior experienced the depth of the emotions that we experience?

Remember how John says at the beginning of his gospel:

“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory.”<sup>9</sup>

He doesn't mean by that that Jesus was some kind of new mixture of deity and humanity. He means that he remained fully God, Lord of all things. And the humanity he took was identical to our humanity apart from sin. He didn't live his life on the basis of a every so often an injection of deity into his life to enable him to cope with his circumstances. That actually would be one of the greatest heresies of the Christian Church. His humanity was real humanity. It was not confused or mixed with his deity. It was as real as my humanity, as real as your humanity, sin apart. But because it was sin apart it meant that he was able to taste human emotion in its most powerful form.

I never taste perfect joy in this world, because I am not perfect and this world isn't perfect. So there is no perfect joy tasted by me. Nor do I taste perfect grief, because even my grief in its overwhelming nature, I experience as a sinner and so I resist it in all kinds of different ways and I run from it.

What makes Jesus distinctive is not that his humanity was different from his humanity. What makes him different was that his sinless humanity tasted heights you and I have never know and his sinless humanity enabled him to taste pain and disappointment that none of us has ever plumbed. Although many of us have spent much of our lives damaged by disappointment. And this is the real Jesus. There is no other Jesus. This is the Jesus who came into the world to share our lead. He is perfectly sensitive to my joys. He is perfectly sensitive to my pains in a life that is full of surprise.

The second thing I want you to notice is the way in which Jesus handled these emotions if we can so speak, because this is so instructive to us, isn't it? He takes pleasure in his Father's gift, in Matthew's gospel, because he loved him. He never sees anything. He never even sees his emotional life as a purely horizontal thing. But he realizes that all of these providences are part of his Father's providence and so he rejoices in his heavenly Father's gift to him. He says to his Father, “That is just one of the most beautiful things you could have given me today.”

And so his heart is enlarged with pleasure in his fellowship with his heavenly Father. And, at the same time, you notice how he responds to this pain in submitting to his Father's purpose and understanding that he has come into the world and the result of that is there is going to be a great division and he bows to the pain of the disappointment. He absorbs the sorrow of the disappointment because he understands that this also is the Father's purpose because if he is not a Savior who is able to come to me in my

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<sup>9</sup> John 1:14.

disappointment, he is not an adequate Savior for me. And so the fruitfulness of Jesus' ministry throughout the ages—never mind during the incarnation—the fruitfulness of Jesus' ministry in your life and my life as people who have been some of us profoundly disappointed, at the end of the day this life is always going to prove disappointing to us, because we are made for glory. But he takes that disappointment and it is going to grow and it is going to lead him to the cross and many disappointments of rejection, especially by those who loved him best. There is the rub. It was those who loved him best who most disappointed him.

So, you see, as the letter to the Hebrews tells us, he is being shaped for usefulness and fruitfulness, just like ourselves. And then there is this other striking feature. You see why Jesus experiences these emotions is because he wants to come nearer to you than the person sitting next to you, even the person to whom you are married, the other members of your family. But if you are entirely on your own at the beginning or middle or end of life, he has tasted everything and more than we taste in order that when we taste it we may know that he is there, we may know that he understands.

In one of the churches I served we had a very striking elder who prayed in very distinctive ways and almost every time I heard him pray he would begin his prayer by saying, "Lord, we come this evening to the sympathizing Jesus." He understands.

And the glorious thing is this. I wonder if you have ever thought about this, that when the disciples saw him ascending into heaven they didn't see his human nature falling back down like a booster rocket. He needed to get there. And both Scripture and many of our great hymns reassure us that there is a man in heaven at the right hand of God, the Son of God still wearing our human nature. And because he does so as Hebrews says, he is able to save every one of us to the uttermost who come to God through him.

So for these three things we pray: to see him more clearly, love him more dearly, follow him more nearly, day by day.

*Lord Jesus, we thank you for the wonder of your person. We thank you for these insights of your Word sprinkled throughout the gospels, about your inner life and what it was like for you to live in this fallen world and to become our Savior. We pray for grace to love you and serve you more. We thank you for all that you have become for us and all that you are to us today. We want to rejoice in the knowledge that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever. We pray that we may thus know you. We ask this in your name.*