

Living Word Fellowship Church

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The Sayings of Christ

I. Introduction

Why would Christ be so distinctive about faith? It is not like Christ need faith. He is the Word and knows all things (John 1:1-4; *“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, and the conviction of things not seen;”* Heb. 11:1). Christ consistently emphasizes faith, often repeating this point when He heals someone, saying, *“YOUR faith has healed you...”* (Matt. 9:22, 29; Mark 10:52, Luke 18:42; 7:50; 17:19). Additionally, He teaches, ‘And He said to them, *“Because of the littleness of your faith; for truly I say to you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you.”* (Mt 17:20; NASU) Christ had taught about the faith of a mustard seed earlier (Mt. 13:31-35). He is emphasizing this in a country where the Word is taught, as in the case of Timothy, from the time a child is born. There are two distinctive lessons we see emphasized, both involving non-Jews.

II. The Centurian and the Syrophenician Woman

A. The Centurian:

What is amazing is that before Christ teaches about the faith of the centurion, He healed a man of leprosy and then told him to go to the priest, in obedience to the Mosaic law, and present himself (Matt. 8:1-4). But in the case of the Centurian, Christ is more distinctive, to the point He would say, with the disciples standing next to Him, in a place where there are High Priests, Pharisees, all the distinguished leaders of Israel; *“I have not found such great faith, with **anyone** in Israel (Matt. 8:10);’* why?:

1. The Centurion:

- a) A centurion was an officer over 100 men in the Roman army. Every centurion mentioned in the Gospels and Acts was a gentleman of high character and sense of duty, and this man was no exception. The fact that he was concerned about a lowly servant-boy indicates this.
- b) It would seem that everything about this man would prevent him from coming to Jesus. He was a professional soldier, and Jesus was a Man of peace. He was a Gentile, and Jesus was a Jew.
- c) The Centurion was a Roman who was exposed, to many gods from birth and was totally loyal to Rome.
- d) He was concerned about one of his servants; amazing.

2. Key Points About his Faith:

- a) I am unworthy for you to come under my roof – Jewish tradition held that a person who entered a Gentile’s house was ceremonially defiled (Jn. 18:28). The centurion, undoubtedly familiar with the law, felt unworthy of having Jesus suffer such an inconvenience for his sake. He also had faith enough to know that Christ could heal by merely speaking a word (vs. 10).
- b) The centurion’s remark that he was a “man under authority” conveyed the fact that he derived his authority to command his soldiers from a source, Caesar, whose freedom to command those in the

empire was unlimited. His affirmation was a statement of faith: his belief that Jesus acted under and with the full authority of God, and thus that distance from his suffering servant could not limit His power to heal. It was this total confidence in Jesus that Christ commends (v. 10)—in centurions, and in you and me.¹

- c) The centurion came to Jesus constantly and earnestly pleading and appealing for Christ's aid. This demonstrated that He believed that Jesus was the only solution. He did not plan to go to anyone else.
- d) He demonstrated that he respected Jewish law:

- ☐ The centurion said what he believed before he personally met Christ, and he continues to believe in the present meeting. He insists that he does not possess and never has possessed the power, competence, nor does he have what it takes to have Christ come to his house.

- e) The centurion's remarks about Christ's authority mean:

- ☐ He accepted that Christ is Lord and therefore has supernatural powers. Despite all the gods he was introduced to from a child, Christ is beyond them all; REMARKABLE, for a Roman officer, because of the level of indoctrination he was exposed to.

- ☐ Because Jesus is the very nature of God (this is implied by Jesus' explanation of the feast). He does not need to violate Jewish law.

- ☐ Because Jesus is the very nature of God, He is everywhere at the same time, so even though He is physically next to him, Jesus is fully with the centurion servant.

- ☐ Jesus has a force that responds to Him just like the centurion. The force must be subject to Jesus's authority. Jesus just needs to say the word.

- f) A few thoughts on the nature of faith:

- ☐ Faith does not rely on common sense (Prov. 3:5-7). The Garden of Eden and Eve make this clear (Gen. 3:1-6).

- ☐ Even though our experiences and our wisdom may sound wise, it is still foolishness to God (1 Cor. 1:21-25; 2:7-8).

- ☐ *"I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God. Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature; a wisdom, however, not of this age nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away; but we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God predestined before the ages to our glory; the wisdom which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory....."* (1 Co 2:3-8; NASU)

- g) The blessings of the centurion's faith can be explained in verse 11:

¹Richards, Lawrence O.: *The Bible Readers Companion*. electronic ed. Wheaton : Victor Books, 1991; Published in electronic form by Logos Research Systems, 1996, S. 610

- ☐ “A reference to the **messianic banquet theme of Is. 25:6-9**. Gentiles now appear in place of the natural sons: This theme recurs in the parable of the wicked landowners (21:33-44, especially v. 43) and the banquet parable (22:1-14). Jesus’ prediction is an early example of the principle developed by Paul in Rom. 9:30-32: Israel tries to pursue righteousness by works and does not obtain it, but Gentiles who know they deserve only condemnation seek God’s mercy and obtain it.”
- Sit down literally means “recline,” as at a banquet table. The coming kingdom is commonly portrayed in terms of a feast, particularly a wedding feast (Matt. 22:1–14; Is. 25:6; Rev. 19:7–10).²
 - “Sons of the kingdom refers to the Jews who held the covenants and promises and should have been heirs of the kingdom. The idea that Gentiles would take their place in the coming kingdom was unthinkable to the Jews.”
 - “The sons of the kingdom *hoi huioi tees basileias*. A favorite Hebrew idiom like "son of hell" ([Matt 23:15](#)), "sons of this age" ([Luke 16:8](#)). The Jews felt that they had a natural right to the privileges of the kingdom because of descent from Abraham ([Matt 3:9](#)). But mere natural birth did not bring spiritual sonship as the Baptist had taught before Jesus did.
- ☐ “Jesus made it clear that being just a physical descendant of Abraham did not guarantee entrance into His kingdom.”³
- ☐ 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. Jesus characterizes that bliss as 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). The contrast between faith and faithlessness thus stands out even more than the miracle Jesus works. “Such great faith” does not refer to a particular quantity but to a quality of faith, which is both Christological in focus and universal in scope. Those who claim to be Christians can also be excluded from the kingdom if they lack either of these two elements. Those who deny people of certain races, classes, or creeds access to God’s message and ministry in this life may find themselves excluded from his presence in the next. As Bruner provocatively warns, “Hell is not a doctrine used to frighten unbelievers; it is a doctrine used to warn those who think themselves believers.”⁴¹⁶
- ☐ I have not found ... not even in Israel: This commendation of the faith of the Gentile centurion was a strong rebuke of the Jewish people. The Israelites thought that they would have priority in the coming kingdom (Is. 45:14; Zech. 8:23; Rom. 9:3–5; Eph. 2:11, 12). Jesus made it clear that being just a physical descendant of Abraham did not guarantee entrance into His kingdom.⁵

²Radmacher, Earl D. ; Allen, Ronald Barclay ; House, H. Wayne: *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Commentary*. Nashville : T. Nelson Publishers, 1999, S. Mt 8:11

³Radmacher, Earl D. ; Allen, Ronald Barclay ; House, H. Wayne: *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Commentary*. Nashville : T. Nelson Publishers, 1999, S. Mt 8:10

⁴¹⁶F. D. Bruner, *The Christbook* (Waco: Word, 1987), 306.

⁵Radmacher, Earl D. ; Allen, Ronald Barclay ; House, H. Wayne: *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Commentary*. Nashville : T. Nelson Publishers, 1999, S. Mt 8:10

h) Outer darkness – meaning “the darkness outside” speaks of the experience of those who do not endure and so will not reign in the kingdom (22:13; Rom. 8:17; 2 Tim. 2:12, 13; 2 John 8; Rev. 3:11) for one thousand years.

- ☐ Outer darkness, meaning “the darkness outside,” speaks of the experience of those who do not endure and so will not reign in the kingdom (Matt. 22:13; Rom. 8:17; 2 Tim. 2:12, 13; 2 John 8; Rev. 3:11). Living with Christ in heaven is a gift (John 3:16; Rom. 4:1–8; 6:23) to be received without cost. But the reign with Christ is a prize to be won with great effort (compare 1 Cor. 9:24–27; Rev. 22:12).⁶
- ☐ The refrain “weeping and gnashing of teeth” highlights the agony of this separation and recurs regularly as a Matthean distinctive (13:42, 50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30).⁷¹⁵

This is why Jesus would say, “*Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.*” (Mt 18:3; NASU)

III. Conclusion

“*And without faith it **is impossible to please Him**, for he who comes to God **must believe** that He is and that He **is a rewarder** of those **who seek Him**.*” (Heb 11:6; NASU)

⁶Radmacher, Earl D. ; Allen, Ronald Barclay ; House, H. Wayne: *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Commentary*. Nashville : T. Nelson Publishers, 1999, S. Mt 8:12-13

⁷¹⁵On the imagery of these metaphors, see esp. E. Schweizer, *The Good News according to Matthew* (Richmond: John Knox, 1975), 215–16.