



SESSION 2

VICTORIOUS HOPE

▶ ***The Point***

When we come to Jesus in faith, we find hope.

▶ ***The Passage***

Matthew 8:5-13

▶ ***The Bible Meets Life***

When we're children, we make a list of things we'll never do when we "get big." For example: "When I'm a parent, I'll never tell my kids, 'Because I said so.'" Then we grow up and have kids. And somewhere along the way, we say to them, "Because I said so!" This cycle may be mildly embarrassing, but it highlights a foundational truth of life: some people have the authority to make things happen just by saying so. Parents are a good example. But God is the best example.

God spoke, and creation happened. Jesus spoke, and Lazarus was raised from the dead. Jesus spoke on another occasion, and a man was healed—without Jesus even being present.

Let's look deeper at that last event. As we'll see from the text, what impressed Jesus in this story was the faith of a centurion: a man who believed a sick servant would be healed simply because Jesus said so. That's the key to true faith; it's believing Jesus can do what He says He can do—and that should give us great hope.

▶ ***The Setting***

Following his account of Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount (see Matt. 5–7), Matthew recorded a series of miracle stories. The first concerned the healing of a leper with a touch (see 8:1–4). In 8:14–15, Matthew recorded the story of Jesus' healing Peter's mother-in-law with a touch. Between these events, Matthew sandwiched in the story of Jesus' healing of a servant from a distance with just a word because of the faith of a Gentile centurion (see vv. 5–13).

What does the Bible say?

Centurion (v. 5)—An officer in the Roman army who was in command of about 80-100 soldiers, likely equal to a captain in today's army.

Outside, into the darkness (v. 12)—Referring to the darkness into which the wicked are confined, it is a place of misery completely removed from the light of God and His eternal kingdom.

Matthew 8:5-13

⁵ When Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him, asking for help.

⁶ “Lord,” he said, “my servant lies at home paralyzed, suffering terribly.”

⁷ Jesus said to him, “Shall I come and heal him?”

⁸ The centurion replied, “Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed.

⁹ 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.”

¹⁰ When Jesus heard this, he was amazed and said to those following him, “Truly I tell you, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith.

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.

¹² But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

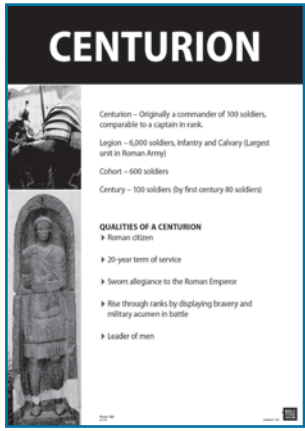
¹³ Then Jesus said to the centurion, “Go! Let it be done just as you believed it would.” And his servant was healed at that moment.



STUDY THE BIBLE

Notes

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ALTERNATE QUESTION:
The centurion approached Jesus directly with his plea. Why do we often come to Jesus as a last resort?

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Matthew 8:5-7

⁵ *When Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him, asking for help.* ⁶ *“Lord,” he said, “my servant lies at home paralyzed, suffering terribly.”* ⁷ *Jesus said to him, “Shall I come and heal him?”*

READ: Matthew 8:5-7 on page 23 of the PSG. Read the text out loud or ask a volunteer to do so.

LEADER PACK: Display Pack Item 2, “Centurion,” to provide group members with background information on this important office within the Roman Empire.

GUIDE: Encourage group members to read through the first paragraph and the bullet list on page 23 of the PSG in order to better understand the revolutionary nature of the centurion’s request.

DISCUSS: Question #2 on page 23 of the PSG: **“What emotions do you typically experience when you have to ask for help?”**

DO: Direct group members to complete the activity “Help!” on page 24 of the PSG. If time permits, encourage volunteers to share their responses.



How likely are you to ask for help when you’ve got a problem? Use the following scales to record your comfort level with asking for help in different areas of life.

How likely are you to ask for help with financial problems?
[Not likely] _____ [Very likely]

How likely are you to ask for help with spiritual problems?
[Not likely] _____ [Very likely]

How likely are you to ask for help with relational problems?
[Not likely] _____ [Very likely]

How likely are you to ask for help with household problems?
[Not likely] _____ [Very likely]

Matthew 8:5-7 Commentary

Jesus desires to heal us.

[Verses 5-6] Capernaum was located on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee and was situated along a major trade route. It was the city Jesus made His home and the center of His public ministry (see Matt. 4:12-17; 9:1; Mark 2:1). Capernaum was important enough to be the location of a military installation, over which a centurion had command.

A **centurion** originally was so named because he commanded 100 soldiers (called a “century”), but by the first century A.D. each centurion commanded about 80 soldiers. According to Luke, this particular centurion had a good relationship with the local Jewish community and was highly thought of by them. He loved the nation of Israel and had helped the Jews of Capernaum build a synagogue (see Luke 7:1-10, esp. vv. 4-5).

The centurion approached Jesus **asking for help**. He also addressed Jesus as “Lord.” The Greek word for **Lord**, *kurios*, was used as a respectful form of address, much like our word “sir.” However, the centurion had heard what Jesus had done for others (see Luke 7:3). Therefore, it seems clear that Matthew intended his readers to also associate the centurion’s address of Jesus with the stronger meaning of “Lord,” pointing to Jesus’ deity.

The Greek word *pais*, translated **my servant**, was a word used of a young boy, a child, a favorite servant, and even a son. The servant may have been the centurion’s personal aide. Furthermore, this servant may have been the only member of the centurion’s household; according to historians, a Roman soldier was not allowed to have a family with him during his 20 year enlistment. Luke noted that the servant was “valued highly” by him, in the sense that this servant was dear and precious to the centurion (Luke 7:2).

The centurion told Jesus, **“my servant lies at home paralyzed.”** The Greek word translated “paralyzed” was associated both with being disabled and with crippling diseases. Matthew didn’t reveal the cause of the servant’s paralysis, but he did detail the servant was **suffering terribly**. Luke added that the servant was “about to die” (Luke 7:2).

[Verse 7] To understand Jesus’ response **“Shall I come and heal him?”** the reader must realize that Jews did not enter the homes of Gentiles or associate with them, as that would have defiled the Jews and made them unclean (see John 18:28; Acts 10:28). In light of this fact, the centurion’s request was very bold.

When Jesus heals, He doesn’t do it in the same way with everyone. He sometimes works miraculously, and He often works through doctors and the medicine He created. He sometimes heals quickly, and sometimes He does so over time. Ultimately, He offers the greatest healing, salvation, by putting one’s faith in Him; such healing leads to spiritual and physical wholeness in heaven with Him.

Matthew 8:8-9 Commentary

Faith in Jesus' authority is necessary for us to have hope.

[Verse 8] For the second time, the centurion addressed Jesus as **"Lord"** (see vv. 6,8), thereby acknowledging his own inferior status. The centurion's response in verses 8-9 teaches us three important truths. First, the centurion knew he did **"not deserve to have [Jesus] come under [his] roof"**. The centurion's admission of his unworthiness shows his humility. He didn't deserve to have Jesus do this for him and neither could he presume upon Jesus for His help. But coming after Jesus' words in verse 7, the centurion's statement also acknowledged the racial issue (Jew-Gentile).

Second, the centurion's words **"but just say the word, and my servant will be healed"** demonstrate he was convinced that Jesus had the power to heal without having to be physically present with his servant. The Jews of Jesus' day considered healing from a distance not only rare, but extremely difficult—something only the most powerful holy men could do. But this centurion considered distance a small matter for Jesus' power. Up to this point in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus had not healed anyone from a distance. The centurion's words were a clear recognition of Jesus' miraculous power.

[Verse 9] Third, the centurion's words about authority and issuing commands show he had an understanding of Jesus' authority to heal with just a word (see 8:8) and not in the usual way of being physically present. The centurion's words **"I myself am a man under authority"** communicated both that the centurion was under his superiors' authority and that the centurion had authority over those under his command. The centurion was not merely under the authority of higher officials in the Roman government for whom he issued orders. He also had received virtually unlimited authority from his superiors. The centurion's commands were not perceived as being given by his own authority; they were understood to be issued with the authority of the Roman Emperor himself. In this sense, the centurion's words "I myself am a man under authority" may be understood as an argument from the lesser to the greater. If he was able to have his will carried out by speaking a mere word—Roman soldiers in general had a great amount of authority over the populace (see 5:41; 27:32)—how much more would that be the case for Jesus!

But we should be careful at this point. The centurion's words should not be understood as a double illustration. The centurion's words **"I myself"** should not be interpreted to indicate the centurion understood that Jesus too was a man under authority as the centurion was (although there is a sense in which Jesus was acting by the authority of God the Father, but that is not the focus in this passage). The primary emphasis is on authority itself, in this case on Jesus' absolute authority. Just as the orders the centurion issued were to be obeyed without question because of his authority, the centurion believed healing his servant who was paralyzed and near death would be no problem for Jesus, whose ultimate authority had to be obeyed as well.

Only by believing in Jesus' ultimate authority can we have the kind of hope the centurion possessed.

Matthew 8:10-13 Commentary

Jesus gives us hope when we believe and trust in Him.

[Verse 10] To this point in Jesus' ministry, none of Jesus' healings had been done in the way the centurion asked (see Matt. 15:21-28). No wonder Jesus **was amazed** and stated, **"Truly I tell you, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith."**

Jesus addressed His words to those following Him rather than to the centurion. Jesus' expression **"Truly I tell you"** indicated the importance of His statement and that it was to be heeded. **Faith** refers to trust and here includes the belief in Jesus' ability to heal the centurion's servant. The faith Jesus had not found in the nation of Israel was that of the centurion, not the sick or injured servant's faith. What made Jesus declare this centurion's faith so great? First, this centurion's humility. Even though he was a high-ranking military official and a great benefactor of the Jews (see Luke 7:5), he saw himself as unworthy. Second, his belief in Jesus' word. From what he had heard of Jesus, without further instruction or debate, he placed his trust in Jesus' word. Third, his proper confession of Jesus' person. The centurion knew Jesus had authority over sickness and disease, and he also knew Jesus had authority over him as well.

[Verses 11-12] The centurion's great faith provided the occasion for Jesus to contrast the future Gentile in-gathering into the kingdom of God with the rejection of the Jews from the kingdom. The **many** refers to the Gentiles. **The east and the west** indicates from all over the earth (see Ps. 107:3). Sitting **at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob**—all three patriarchs—is imagery of the messianic banquet, the experience of blessedness in God's presence that every good Jew assumed he would be part of.

The **subjects of the kingdom** refers to those Jews who expected to be included in God's kingdom based merely on their ancestry (see Matt. 3:9). **Subjects** (*huiioi*) implies legal standing, or presumed legal standing. Here the Jews discovered that even though they believed they should be included in God's kingdom, they found themselves confined to the place meant for the ungodly. In fact, Jesus here used terms in relation to the sons of the kingdom that normally were reserved for the expected, ultimate future of the Gentiles: **thrown outside, into the darkness** and **weeping and gnashing of teeth**. **Outside, into the darkness** signifies eternal separation from God. **Weeping** refers to mourning over one's separation from God and exclusion from His kingdom. **Gnashing of teeth** reflects great anguish.

[Verse 13] Jesus then turned His attention back to the centurion, telling him to go home. Again, Jesus linked the servant's healing with the centurion's faith (**"just as you believed"**). That is, the centurion's faith was not the cause of the miracle; rather, this means "just as" he believed Jesus could do. Jesus' words need to be understood in light of verse 8.

Matthew added the time reference for the cure, **at that moment** ("the instant," "immediately"), as a final emphasis on Jesus' supernatural authority.



5 minutes

LIVE IT OUT

Notes

Dotted lines for taking notes.

GUIDE: Direct group members to page 28 of the PSG. Encourage them to consider the following options for expressing their faith in Christ this week:



- ▶ **Review the Word.** One way to see God’s power and ability to work on your behalf is to see how He worked in the Scriptures. Look at the accounts of several heroes from the Old Testament and review what God did in their lives.
- ▶ **Review your past.** Make a list of the major events in your life in recent years. Use that list to build your faith by praying through the different ways He has worked on your behalf.
- ▶ **Take a leap.** Ask God to include you in something huge for His kingdom. Ask to be part of something that is “God-sized”—something that can only be explained by the fact that He is at work.

Wrap It Up

TRANSITION: Read or restate the Conclusion from page 28 of the PSG:

God has the authority to say “Because I said so” in all spheres of life. He has the authority to bless your life with hope and joy. Embrace that truth by confidently seeking Him in faith.

PRAY: Conclude by praising God for the blessing of hope, and for the privilege of following Him in faith each day. Pray that your group’s faith would serve as examples to those who come in contact with each of you throughout the week.

**GROUPS
MATTER.**

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