

Matthew 8:1-17

“Jesus is the good and gracious King, not a harsh and distant King”

What might cause us to think wrongly about Jesus?

Experiences in life/circumstances that we go through. Unmet/mistaken expectations. Suffering.

Read Matthew 8:1-4.

What did the leper doubt about Jesus? What did he not doubt?

The leper doubted Jesus’ willingness to heal him (“... if you are willing ...”) but was in no doubt regarding Jesus’ ability to heal him (“... you can make me clean ...”).

In what ways might we have similar doubts?

Responses may revolve around the theme of being assured of God’s power but unsure of his goodness. ‘He might be powerful ... but is he good?’

What is radical about what the leper does?

Given that at the time he would have been considered unclean, he would usually have had to avoid crowds and contact with people. Here he comes to Jesus, kneels before him and expresses faith.

What is even more remarkable about what Jesus does?

Jesus’ compassion, evidenced in his willingness to reach out his hand and touch the leper, is remarkable. So too is his power and ability to instantaneously make the leper clean, without himself becoming unclean. He is both powerful and good.

In a spiritual sense, the Bible pictures all those outside of Christ as being unclean like this leper. What might prevent us from coming to Jesus? If we are already in Christ, what might cause us to forget that this was once our situation?

Like the leper, if we are conscious of how desperate our situation is we may doubt God’s willingness to save us. Conversely, we may doubt the power of the cross to achieve our rescue and cleansing.

We can become proud (‘I’m not what I once was’ ... ‘I’m not like that person’) and lose sight of the truth, “But for the grace of God ...”. We may lose, or have reduced, contact with people who are like we once were.

Read Matthew 8:5-13.

Given what we are told about him in verses 5 and 6, what kind of man is this centurion?

A “centurion” was someone in charge of one hundred soldiers. As such, from a Jewish perspective, he was part of the hated and despised occupying forces that ruled Israel at the time. At the same time, given his concern for the well-being of one of his servants, we might consider this centurion to be compassionate and caring.

What about the centurion particularly astonishes Jesus?

In verse 10, Matthew tells us that Jesus is astonished by what the centurion says in verses 8-9. This Gentile man has displayed faith such as which Jesus has not encountered anywhere even in Israel!

What does the example of the centurion teach us about what faith is?

The centurion is patently aware of his own unworthiness before Jesus – “Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof” (v. 8a). Yet he comes in his desperate need to Jesus and simply believes that Jesus’ word is sufficient to heal his servant (v. 8b and v. 13).

Carson adds the following comment – “All ‘authority’ belonged to the emperor and was delegated. Therefore, because he was under the emperor’s authority, when the centurion spoke, he spoke with the emperor’s authority, and so his command was obeyed. A foot soldier who disobeyed would not be defying a mere centurion but the emperor, Rome itself, with all its imperial majesty and might. This self-understanding the centurion applied to Jesus. Precisely because Jesus was under God’s authority, he was vested with God’s authority, so that when Jesus spoke, God spoke. To defy Jesus was to defy God; and Jesus’ word must therefore be vested with God’s authority that is able to heal sickness. This analogy, though not perfect, reveals an astonishing faith that recognises that Jesus needed neither ritual, magic, nor any other help; his authority was God’s authority, and his word was effective because it was God’s word” (The Expositor’s Bible Commentary – Matthew and Mark – p 239).

What is the encouragement and what is the challenge for us from Jesus’ words in verses 11 and 12?

In a sense, we are among those who have “come from the east and the west”. It is our great privilege to join even Abraham, Isaac and Jacob at the feast in the kingdom of heaven. However, if even “the subjects of the kingdom” are not spared there is no ground for presumption, hardness of heart, or refusal to come in trusting obedience to Jesus.

In what ways might Matthew's account of this episode be described as "a man with authority encountering one with greater authority still"?

The centurion is clearly a man possessing a significant degree of authority. However, even he is powerless in the face of his servant's paralysis and suffering. Jesus, on the other hand, is able to do the impossible. From a distance, and simply with a word, he heals the centurion's servant.

Read Matthew 8:14-17.

In what ways do we see Jesus bringing people back from the brink in these verses?

Peter's mother-in-law is healed of her fever (a far more serious situation than compared to what it is today). People that are demon-possessed, as well as the sick, all experience healing from Jesus.

From this passage, we clearly see that Jesus had time for the marginalised. As his people in the world today, how might we minister to those who are marginalised?