

Centurion's Slave Healed

The passages that we will be exploring in this study (Matt. 8:5-13; Luke 7:1-10) have been criticized by some who have a low view of the Bible or the Christian faith. Some have attempted to use these two passages to prove that the Bible was not written by God but simply by men. The critics have identified what they believe are inconsistencies between the two accounts about the healing of a centurion's slave. As a result, they claim that the Bible is not inspired and contains errors. Admittedly, this is a difficult account if one casually reads the two passages and makes simple assumptions about how the gospels or any other books of the Bible were written. So put your thinking hat on, get out your shovel, and prepare to dig deep as we head into this study. This study is different from our other studies because the issues are significant and the criticism has been serious. Our study will be rewarding and encouraging when we get to the end.

RETURN TO GALILEE. The message of the Sermon on the Mount was direct and powerful. It challenged men and women to consider their relationships to God. How many decided to follow Jesus as a result of the sermon is unknown. The truth is that men and women follow God because the Holy Spirit draws them. Since we are born spiritually dead (Eph. 2:1-3), God must pull us to Himself. Mysteriously, the Holy Spirit used the sermon and still uses it to motivate people to action.

When Jesus finished the Sermon on the Mount, He returned to His hometown of Capernaum in Galilee.

When He had completed all His discourse in the hearing of the people, He went to Capernaum. (NASB) Luke 7:1

The trip would have taken two or three days to complete. He must have returned tired and weary, ready for some rest.

THE ISSUES. But when

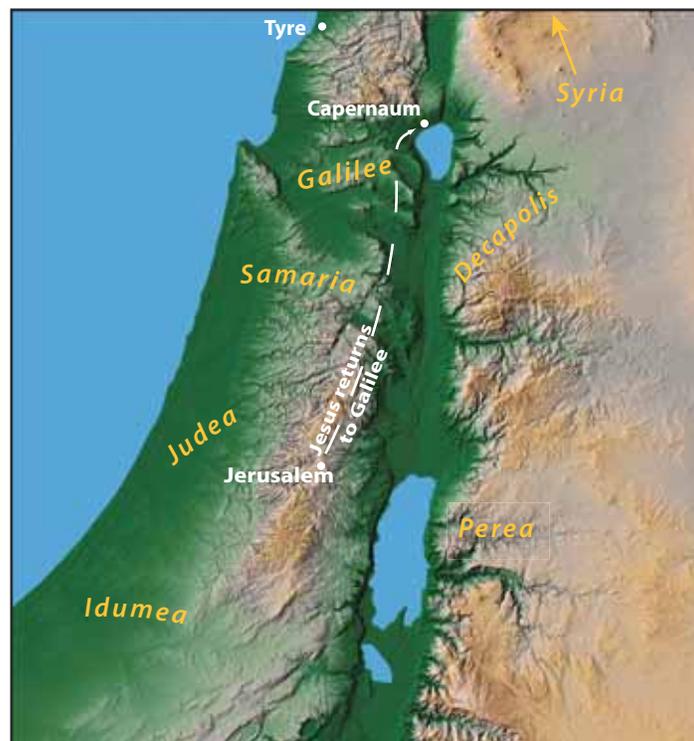
He arrived in Capernaum, the gospel of Matthew tells us that a centurion met Him and asked for help.

And when Jesus entered Capernaum, a centurion came to Him, imploring Him, and saying, "Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, fearfully tormented." (NASB) Matt. 8:5-6

However, the gospel of Luke appears to have a different version of the event that occurred,

And a centurion's slave, who was highly regarded by him, was sick and about to die. When he heard about Jesus, he sent some Jewish elders asking Him to come and save the life of his slave. (NASB) Luke 7:2-3

A quick comparison of the two accounts reveals that there are three areas of apparent disagreement: 1) Matthew says the centurion came to Jesus while Luke



says some Jewish leaders came to Jesus; 2) Matthew says the ill person was the centurion's servant, but Luke calls him a slave; and 3) Matthew says the individual was paralyzed, and Luke says he was sick and about to die.

WHO APPROACHED JESUS?

Of the three issues, the major problem is who approached Jesus - the centurion (Matt. 8:5-6) or the Jewish leaders (Luke 7:2-3)? Those who reject the Bible as being divinely inspired are motivated to find error and conclude that the two passages contradict each other. They want to discredit the Bible rather than explore the possibility that it is accurate. But if the Bible is divinely inspired, then

the two passages are not in disagreement and they faithfully record what truly happened. This apparent problem exists because Matthew and Luke recorded only the aspects of the event that were important to them.

The problem disappears if we start with Luke's account of the event. From Luke we discover that after the centurion had heard that Jesus was back in Capernaum, he sent some Jewish leaders to Jesus to plead for healing.

When he heard about Jesus, he sent some Jewish elders asking Him to come and save the life of his slave. (NASB) Luke 7:3

When the Jewish leaders arrived, they gave a patriotic and religious plea as the reason why Jesus should heal the slave.

When they came to Jesus, they earnestly implored Him, saying, "He is worthy for You to grant this to him; for he loves our nation and it



Centurion Seeking Jesus' Healing For His Slave

was he who built us our synagogue." (NASB) Luke 7:4-5

The nature of their plea revealed what they considered to be a good reason for helping someone. They revealed their hearts - their sense of what is important. They were not motivated by the fact that someone was sick, in pain, and near death. Instead these religious leaders presented their case from a worldly perspective and not from a spiritual perspective.

The leaders believed that this Gentile centurion deserved some help because he had given money and maybe donated some labor enabling them to build a synagogue. The fact that someone

was sick, in pain, and near death was not enough. We will discover later that Jesus was not motivated by their worldly values. Yet, He agreed to go to the centurion's home and heal the slave.

Now Jesus started on His way with them; and when He was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends, saying to Him, "Lord, do not trouble Yourself further, for I am not worthy for You to come under my roof; for this reason I did not even consider myself worthy to come to You, but just say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I also am a man placed under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to this one, 'Go!' and he goes, and to another, 'Come!' and he comes, and to my slave, 'Do this!' and he does it." (NASB) Luke 7:6-8

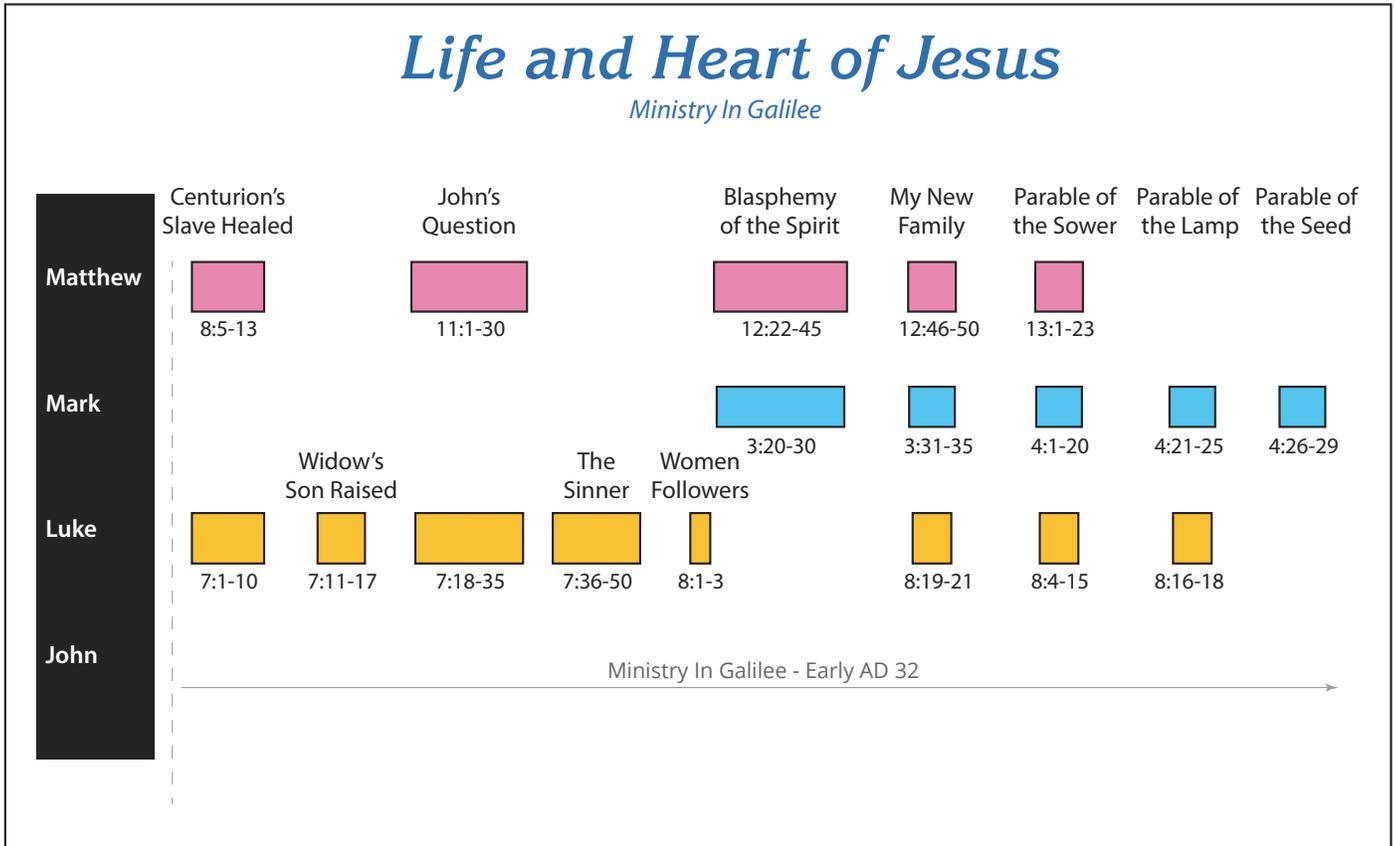
Issues With The Passage

- Did the Centurion come to Jesus or did the Jewish Leaders?
- Was the ill person the Centurion's servant or slave?
- Was the person paralyzed or near death?

Jesus started walking and when He was "not far from" the centurion's home, the centurion sent friends to stop Him from coming

Life and Heart of Jesus

Ministry In Galilee



closer to his home. This implies that some type of communication system was being used to tell the centurion the latest location of Jesus. Maybe there were some Roman cavalry with the Jewish leaders who were periodically returning to the centurion to keep him informed, or maybe there were foot soldiers racing ahead of Jesus. Otherwise, the centurion would not have known that Jesus was closer rather than at some distance.

When the centurion heard that Jesus was near, he sent some friends who quoted the centurion as saying, "I am not worthy for you to come under my roof, for this reason I did not even consider myself worthy to come to You . . ." The centurion did not want Jesus to come to his home because he felt unworthy. Now that is great respect and humility from a Roman centurion who was an authority figure and used to being served.

But Matthew reveals that Jesus continued walking toward the centurion's home anyway. Jesus ignored the request of the centurion's friends. The centurion did not know it, but Jesus was coming to see him. Matt. 8:5b reveals that when

the centurion saw that Jesus was coming anyway, he left his home and went out to meet Jesus.

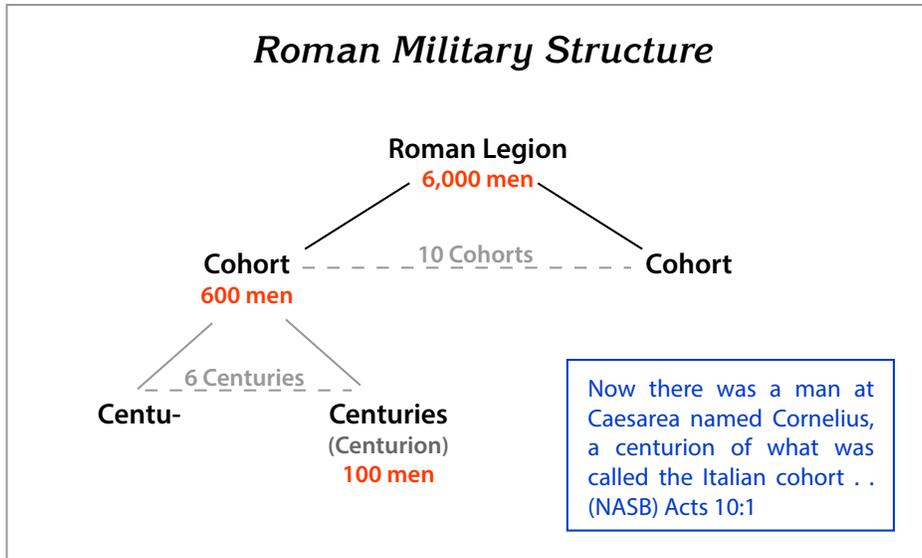
... a centurion came to Him, imploring Him . . . (NASB) Matt. 8:5b

The Greek word PROSERCHOMAI which is translated as "came" has the sense of someone approaching another who is also coming toward him. That is, the centurion discovered that Jesus was continuing to approach his home, and so he finally in desperation, personally went out to meet Jesus, to stop Him from coming any further. Jesus wanted to meet the centurion; so He motivated the centurion to come to Him.

When the centurion finally stood before Jesus face-to-face he told Jesus about his slave and then made a personal plea that He not come further.

... "Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, fearfully tormented." Jesus said to him, "I will come and heal him." But the

centurion said, “Lord, I am not worthy for You to come under my roof, but just say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I also am a man under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to this one, ‘Go!’ and he goes, and to another, ‘Come!’ and he comes, and to my slave, ‘Do this!’ and he does it.” (NASB) Matt. 8:6-9



to conclude that Jesus never emphasized a point or repeated His statements.

Matthew’s statement is more pointed. Luke says that Jesus had not yet seen the centurion’s faith anywhere in Israel, but Matthew reveals

The centurion’s faith was great. He knew that Jesus could heal from a distance. He believed that Jesus did not need to place his hand on the slave, speak to him, or pray over him. When Jesus heard this, He was amazed.

Now when Jesus heard this, He marveled at him, and turned and said to the crowd that was following Him, “I say to you, not even in Israel have I found such great faith.” (NASB) Luke 7:9

Jesus had not yet found this type of faith anywhere in Israel. And so He turned to the crowd and declared that this man’s faith was exceedingly above and beyond normal expectations.

Matthew records slightly different wording.

Now when Jesus heard this, He marveled and said to those who were following, “Truly I say to you, I have not found such great faith with anyone in Israel.” (NASB) Matt. 8:10

It appears that Jesus repeated His statement for emphasis (Jesus was amazed). I often do that to emphasize a point. I reword things for emphasis and build up to the point that I really want to make. Matthew recorded a statement that is stronger than the one Luke recorded. It is unreasonable

that Jesus had not seen this type of faith in ANY PERSON in Israel. Jesus added emphasis. He was stressing His point by repeating His statement and emphasizing that no one in Israel had this type of faith. He had not found anyone’s faith like that of the centurion. We will see shortly that Jesus will heal the slave because of His compassion for him and because the centurion believed that Jesus could heal.

Matthew reveals that Jesus made other comments that were not recorded by Luke,

I say to you that many will come from east and west, and recline at the table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven; but the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” (NASB) Matt. 8:11-12

Jesus’ additional statement tells us that many Jews will not enter the kingdom of heaven, but many Gentiles will. Why? The Jews lacked the great faith displayed by the centurion. They rejected Jesus, but the centurion did not. He believed in Him.

SERVANT OR SLAVE? The critics’ second complaint is that Matthew says the ill person was a servant. Luke says that he was a slave. This issue is simply resolved by investigating the Greek words that Matthew and Luke used. Matthew used the Greek word PAIS and Luke used DOULOS. They used different Greek words. This immediately alerts us

to the fact that there is not a conflict.

The Greek word PAIS had a broad range of meanings ranging from son, child, boy, youth, servant, or slave. DOULOS has only one meaning - slave.

... my servant is lying paralyzed at home, fearfully tormented.
(NASB) Matt. 8:5

And a centurion's slave, who was highly regarded by him, . . .
(NASB) Luke 7:2

Matthew used a general term, and Luke used a specific term. Luke wanted to be precise (Luke 1:1-4) in his writings and he was. DOULOS described the sick person as a slave, and PAIS revealed the emotion of the centurion's heart for his slave. Luke tells us that the slave was highly regarded. He was like a son. The Greek word that is translated as "highly regarded" is ENTIMOS. It means "precious." That is, the centurion had a very strong attachment to his slave. He was like a son to him. That is the reason he came pleading for his life.

PARALYZED OR NEAR DEATH? Another apparent conflict is that Matthew tells us the centurion said his slave was paralyzed and fearfully tormented. Yet, Luke describes him as sick and about to die. The answer is found in the three Greek words that Matthew uses to describe the slave's paralysis. First, the Greek word for "paralyzed" is PARALUTIKOS. The word refers to someone who was lame or paralyzed.

The next two words indicate that the slave was not just lame or paralyzed. The next two words reveal that the paralysis was the result of a disease that was causing great pain and torment.

The second Greek word is BASANIZO. It was used to describe someone who was in torment or who was being tortured. The third Greek word is DEINOS. It was used to refer to an extremely negative condition.

Together these three words reveal that the disease had been tormenting the slave. He was at the extreme point of the suffering. This past year I was having some pain in my left knee. So I went to a doctor for an evaluation. I was

asked, "How strong is the pain on a scale of 1 to 10? Ten being the most severe." I told the nurse that the pain varied from day to-day. According to the Greek, this slave's pain was a "10." It was at the extreme end. So the slave was being tortured and according to PARALUTIKOS it had resulted in him being paralyzed. So when Luke, the medical doctor, said that he was sick and near death, he had focused on a doctor's immediate concern. The slave was near death. Jesus was being asked to heal someone who was extremely sick and near death.

CONCLUSION. Matthew and Luke recorded different aspects of this event. Matthew recorded the end of the event - the final moments - and the personal interaction between Jesus and the centurion while Luke emphasized the cold heart of the Jewish leaders. The centurion's slave was extremely ill and near death. It is amazing that the Jewish leaders did not ask for mercy for the slave. Instead, they appealed to a sense of reward for one who had given much to Israel. It is clear that they were motivated by duty and not by their hearts. They were coldly orthodox.

Together Matthew and Luke paint an incredible story of cold orthodoxy contrasted to passionate love and a great faith. Cold orthodoxy is often without love and it is often missing true faith. A heart that lacks real love does not have true faith. It does not know God. That is the message of the following passage,

The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love.
(NASB) 1 John 4:8

The centurion had great faith, and he had a great heart. So Jesus healed the slave from a distance because his owner loved him and believed that Jesus could heal him. Jesus did not heal the slave out of some sense of duty. There were no hands laid on, no prayers over the slave, no exorcisms, or healing service. Jesus just did it. He healed the slave because the centurion believed Jesus could heal and He did.

And Jesus said to the centurion, "Go; it shall be done for you as you have believed." And the servant was healed that very moment. (NASB) Matt. 8:13

The slave was healed instantly - immediately. There was no waiting period for healing.

When those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the slave in good health. (NASB) Luke 7:10

Luke tells us that when the centurion's friends returned, they found the boy to be healed. They doubted. It is good that the slave's healing did not depend upon the faith of the centurion's friends.

Are you in need of healing? If so, Jesus asks, "Do you believe that I can heal you?" Do you have the faith of the centurion? That is, do you believe that Jesus can? Then ask Him for healing, and He will heal if it is His will.

The book of Daniel tells us that Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego had refused to worship an idol that King Nebuchadnezzar had erected. So he summoned them to his

court and ordered them to bow down and worship his idol. He threatened them with a furnace of fire. Now listen to their response,

If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire; and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But even if He does not, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up. (NASB) Dan. 3:17-18

These men believed in God, but they also understood that God had a will too! Daniel 3 then tells us that God chose to rescue them. He honored their faith. Why did we talk about this Old Testament event? The point is simple. God asks us to believe that He can and not that He will.

May the Lord bless you.

RELATED ARTICLES.

Jack Shaffer. A Harmonization of Matt 8:5-13 and Luke 7:1-10. Master's Seminary Journal. Fall. 2006. p. 35.