

Guest Preacher Rev. Roddy J Campbell

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Preacher: Rev. RJ Campbell

[0 : 00] Seeking the Lord's help and blessing. Let us turn back to the portion of scripture that we read together in the New Testament, the Gospel according to Matthew and chapter 8, and we can read at verse 5.

When he had 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, and so on. Matthew, he arranges the material that we have in his Gospel intentionally, but not necessarily chronologically.

This at times causes that we find slight variations in the Gospels. Matthew arranges his material around certain themes.

And in chapter 8 and 9, he arranges his material around the theme that he introduces for us earlier on in his Gospel, in chapter 4, verse 23, where he writes, It is really a summary of the ministry of Jesus that he carried out in word and in deed.

[1 : 35] In the Sermon on the Mount, chapters 5 to 7, we see Jesus' ministry in word. And now in chapter 8, Matthew is going to tell us about Jesus' ministry of deeds.

In chapter 8 and 9 of the Gospel of Matthew, we have recorded for us 10 miracles that Jesus performed. Alongside these miracles, we have two sections on discipleship.

And it begins in chapter 8 with miracles of healing of three people who would have been considered unlikely from a Jewish point of view.

We have a leper, a Gentile, and a woman. The chapter begins with the cleansing of the leper.

And the leper is an illustration to us of our own great spiritual condition. It is a picture for us of our own spiritual condition and of our need as sinners.

[2 : 44] And it illustrates for us how the leper, out of his overwhelming sense of his need, came to Jesus for help.

And he received healing. And likewise, we are instructed also to come to Jesus, who alone can give us healing and life from that condition that threatens to destroy us forever in eternal death.

Matthew does not tell us how this man came to hear of Jesus, how the leper heard of Jesus, but it is clear that the man knew enough to know that Jesus had the power, had the ability to heal or to cleanse him.

This man knew that his condition was incurable by the hand of man, and that the law could not provide the cure. In fact, the law would condemn this man.

Many today know that they are sinners.

[4 : 04] Persons, especially under the sound of the gospel, people under sound gospel preaching will tell you that they are sinners.

But have we really seen our sin? I am sure that if I was to ask every one of you today gathered here this morning, that you'd all say that you were sinners.

But have you really seen your sin? Has your sin become a burden to you? No doubt the leper's condition had become a burden to him.

And he was looking for a cure. Maybe this morning that this is your problem. Your sin has not become a burden to you.

You will easily and willingly confess that you are a sinner. But your sin has not really become a burden for you.

[5 : 09] You see, this man, his leprosy had become a burden for him. Therefore, he was seeking a cure.

You know, perhaps you're here today and you know nothing of a tender conscience that bleeds under the touch of God.

The apostle Paul once cried out, O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I think this leper, that he knew something of that cry.

His leprosy had become a burden for him. And he was seeking a cure. Has your sin become a burden for you?

And are you seeking a cure? Are you seeking salvation today? To be saved from what your sin deserves.

[6 : 13] However, this morning we shall look at the request of a centurion for his servant to be healed. We have this story also recorded for us in the Gospel of Luke and chapter 7.

And there are slight variations and we'll look at them in turn. The whole story took place in Capernaum. And this was the most important city on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee, which is indicated for us by the presence of a Roman centurion and a detachment maybe of around a hundred soldiers.

It was here that Jesus established his headquarters for a major part of his public ministry. In Matthew chapter 9, Capernaum is called his own city.

And at least three of his disciples actually came from this city. Many miracles were performed by Jesus in and around the city.

But the people, in spite of their great privileges that they had, they continued on unbelief. And so we find Jesus' pronouncement upon the city, pronouncing the city's destruction.

[7 : 41] In Matthew chapter 11, we read, And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven. You will be brought down to Hades.

For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I tell you that it will be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom than for you.

And that was because Capernaum was a privileged city where great works were done, but they rejected and despised it all.

And soon that city was to become our own. However, it was in that city that a Roman centurion was placed.

So we have here a Gentile, a Roman soldier, a centurion whose servant was dear to him, and who, according to Luke's account, the servant was ready to die.

[8 : 51] The servant was up against humanity's last enemy, which is death. It is a reminder to us of our own mortality. Sooner or later, his situation is one that we must all face because we are all under the sentence of death.

One day we are all going to die, and unless there is some way for us to gain life after death, we will suffer eternal death.

What we find here is, in this man, the centurion, is a loving and concerned centurion. The centurion wanted to do all he could for his servant, but what could he do?

Well, here there are lessons for us as well. We share the gospel, and people still do not want to know Jesus.

What do you do when there is nothing else that you can do to help the people that you love? Well, we are to do what the centurion did.

[10 : 05] He brought the matter to Jesus, for this was his only hope. We read that the centurion came forward to Jesus, appealing to him.

Now, the word appealing there is a strong word. The centurion was making an earnest and sincere request to Jesus.

And when we bring our loved ones to Jesus, when we bring them to the throne of grace, when we bring them to the point of prayer, we must do so with an earnest and with a sincere heart, with an earnest and a sincere request.

This was a request from the centurion, a request that came from the heart. It was not just mere words. The centurion felt not only that Jesus could heal the servant, but that he could heal the servant at once.

that Jesus could heal the servant completely, and that he could heal the servant without moving a step nearer his home.

[11 : 14] He told him, you say the word, and my servant will be healed. This is the only hope for sinners. We can try all other means, but nothing can give spiritual healing except Jesus.

Nothing can meet our needs as sinners under the condemnation of God, under the wrath of God, under the curse of sin.

Nothing can meet our need except Jesus. There is no other way by which our sins and what our sins deserve can be dealt with.

They can only be dealt with in one place, and that is with Jesus. Jesus and him crucified. Jesus, where he dealt with what our sins deserve, where he dealt with our sin and the consequences of our sin at the cross on Golgotha.

His atoning work at the cross is the answer, and the only answer to my needs and your needs as sinners today.

[12 : 38] If we bypass Jesus, then we leave ourselves with no hope but a fearful looking for what our sins deserve.

This is a great lesson for us. For we must all face the reality of death. It is always calling out to us, but we must also consider the reality of what is beyond death and that which is eternal.

There is another ending sphere beyond death which we refer to as our long home, our destiny beyond death, and that is the reality of heaven or the reality of hell.

The centurion in our narrative here was staring at death and he was a man who had seen many people die, possibly attended many crucifixions, but here was the death of someone who was so dear to him.

He is touched by his servant's illness and he understands that there is nothing he can do despite the fact that he loves his servant, but there is nothing that he can do.

[14 : 09] Death is going to conquer the one whom he loves. It is remarkable to see the centurion's care and compassion for his servant, for servants in the Roman Empire was looked upon as mere possessions, and when they became of no use, they would be left and disposed of with no care, no compassion whatsoever shown to them.

But here is a centurion. He loves his servant. He is concerned for his servant. He shows compassion towards his servant.

And the word translated here for servant is actually the word for a child or a young person. So we are right to maintain that this servant was a young person.

And I know this morning that you have loved ones who are without Christ and without hope. And how does that affect you? Like the centurion, despite your care and compassion and love for them, you may be conscious of your very helplessness to help them regarding their spiritual condition.

You may do as much as you can for their physical and their temporal condition. But you feel helpless and hopeless to help them regarding their spiritual condition.

[15 : 42] But listen to what we are told about the centurion. We are told that he heard of Jesus. How he heard of him? We do not know. But he realized that there was any hope for a servant, then it was Jesus.

And if there is any hope for your child or the person whom you are very concerned about, who you meet with all the physical needs that that person has, but you feel so helpless and hopeless regarding the spiritual condition of that person, then there is hope if you bring that person to Jesus.

The centurion realized that if there was any hope for a servant, it was Jesus. And if there is any hope for any person here today, or for a loved one that you know who may not be present here today, who is Christless, if there is any hope, it is Jesus.

The centurion condemns many of us who have heard of Jesus, of his power to deal with sin, and yet who neglects to come to Jesus.

And that person may be you today. And the centurion condemns you because you have heard of Jesus, you have heard of the power to deal with sin, you have seen the transformation in people's lives, who have come to Jesus.

[17 : 18] And yet, today, you're here, and you continue to neglect to come to Jesus. The centurion heard of Jesus and believed that Jesus was the only hope left for his servant.

Do you believe that Jesus is the only hope for sinners? that if we are going to receive any spiritual healing, then we must come to Jesus.

If what our sins deserve is going to be dealt with, then we must come to Jesus. If we are going to experience eternal life beyond the grave, then it is to be found only in Jesus.

The centurion is beckoning you this morning to come to Jesus for healing. He is beckoning you this morning to take all your loved ones to Jesus.

The centurion did not only believe that Jesus was the answer, but he acted upon it. You may be here this morning and you're saying, well, I confess that I am a sinner.

[18 : 40] And I know, I've heard, and I've realised that Jesus is the only hope, that Jesus is the only one who can deal with my guilt and all the consequences of sin.

And there you stop. You see, you reach a certain point and you stop. But that's not true of the centurion.

He had heard about Jesus, how Jesus had healed others. He had heard about Jesus, how he would perform miracles. But he didn't just stop there.

He acted. He came to Jesus. And you know, many today, and you're here today, and you believe that Jesus is the answer, and yet you will be lost eternally because of your own inaction.

Lost eternally because of your own inaction. In the Gospel of Luke, we are told that when the Genturian heard of Jesus, that he sent to him the elders of the Jews, beseeching him that he would come and heal his servant.

[19 : 59] here again is a remarkable thing that we find a group of Jewish elders interceding on behalf of the Roman soldier, of the centurion regarding his servant, for usually they were not very fond of Roman soldiers and of centurions.

Matthew, of course, says that the centurion came to Jesus, and I almost hear you saying contradiction straight away. Matthew says the centurion came to Jesus, Luke says that he sent Jewish elders to Jesus.

Well, it could be that the centurion sought the help of others, for he himself was a Roman, he was a Gentile, and maybe he thought that it would be an advantage to him to have the help of others, and who better to send than Jewish elders.

Or it could be the words of the Jewish elders carried the same authority as if the centurion himself was present. And I tend to lean to that thought.

So there is no contradiction. The words of the Jewish elders carried the same authority as if the centurion himself was present. They could have acted as the centurion ambassadors.

[21 : 16] What is an ambassador? Well, an ambassador is someone who speaks on behalf of others. And the words of an ambassador are taken as if the people themselves are those who represent were present.

Our nation sends ambassadors to other nations. And their word is taken as if those who are representatives of the people of that nation.

This is how Paul describes the preaching of the gospel. In 2 Corinthians 5, he says, therefore we are ambassadors for Christ. God making his appeal through us.

We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. Every preacher of the gospel is an ambassador. He's an ambassador for Christ.

He is taking the words of Christ and he gives them to his people, to the people, even as if Christ himself was present.

[22 : 19] And so that's the way that the centurion and the Jewish elders. And when the elders came to Jesus, Luke tells us, and when they came, they pleaded with him honestly, saying, he is worthy to have you do this for him.

For he loves our nation and he is the one who built us our synagogue. We are told that Jesus went with the Jewish elders to heal the centurion servant, but when he was not far from his house, the centurion sent friends, saying, Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof, but only say the word, I, my servant, will be healed.

Now, I think what is important for us to understand here is the self-assessment of the centurion in comparison to the assessment of the Jewish elders.

What do I mean? Well, see this. They thought the centurion deserved whatever help he needed. He was a good man who cared for his servants and gave a lot of money to the local congregation there, to the local synagogue.

And they were saying, surely such a man was worthy of special consideration. But now look at how the centurion thought. By the grace of God, the centurion saw himself as he really was.

[23 : 44] He knew that he was not worthy at all. he was not even worthy to be under the same roof as Jesus. What he said here was very personal.

He said that he himself was unworthy. And what made him unworthy was the worthiness of Jesus. He could see that Jesus was more than a travelling teacher, a healer.

that Jesus was a lot more than that. How do you see Jesus today? And how do you see yourself today?

When we see the holiness of Jesus, it brings before us a conviction of our own sin and unworthiness. Do you know that? Do you know by experience to be convicted of your sin and your unworthiness?

Have you ever been in that place where you have been convicted of your sin and your unworthiness? When the prophet Isaiah was made aware of the majesty and holiness of God, hear what he said, Woe is me for I am undone because I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips for my knives have seen the king, the lord of hosts.

[25 : 10] Of course, there is more to salvation than seeing our unworthiness before God. But we need to see our unworthiness before God. We need to see our sin.

For unless we see our sin, unless we see ourselves as we truly are, as sinners under condemnation, under the wrath of God, deserving eternal death, and it's only when we see that, that we understand the goodness of a saviour.

it is only then that we come to understand what the saviour is. There is more to salvation, yes, we also need true faith in Jesus Christ.

What is that? Well, may I put it simply this morning, it is giving yourselves, leaning upon Christ, committing yourselves to Jesus Christ.

committing yourselves to Jesus Christ. And that's the beginning of salvation. It must begin with a sense of our unworthiness, a conviction that we are sinners before God, to see ourselves as we truly are before God as sinners.

[26 : 23] Have you ever seen that? Have you seen yourself as you truly are before God as sinners? sinners, to see our hopelessness, to see our helplessness, to see our inability to deal with the guilt of sin and with what our sins deserve.

The centurion believed that Jesus had the authority and the power to heal and save the young servant, but he was also aware of his own unworthiness.

Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof, but only say the word and my servant will be healed. The centurion brought before the analogy of his own word for himself was a man who exercised authority, for he said, 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. The centurion believed that Jesus had the power, and also the willingness to heal.

Today, my friend, Jesus has the power to save you from what your sins deserve, and he is willing to do it.

[27 : 44] the unwillingness is not on the part of Jesus. The unwillingness is yours. The unwillingness is on your part.

You've heard about Jesus, but you do not act upon the knowledge that you have received. You've come to a point and you stop there. it is not because of the unwillingness of Jesus to say that people are in hell today.

It is because of their own unwillingness to lean and commit themselves to Jesus. But the centurion believed that Jesus had the power and the willingness to heal.

Only say the word and my servant will be healed. The centurion unworthiness drove him to Jesus and your sense of your unworthiness should drive you to Jesus today.

You are unworthy, but Jesus died for the unworthy. He came not to call and say the righteous, but the sinners and the unworthy. Christ comes to you and he tells you there is no fitness wanted for coming to me except that you come as a sinner to receive the healing that I can provide for you.

[29 : 09] Do you today believe that Jesus and him crucified is the power of God and the wisdom of God for your salvation?

Only say the word and my servant shall be healed. The writer to the Hebrew writes, for the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

The centurion was fully convinced of the authority and power that pertained to the word as coming from Jesus. Only say the word and my servant will be healed.

On another occasion after preaching, Jesus says to Peter, put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch. And Peter answered, Master, we toiled all night and took nothing, but at your word I will let down the nets.

And when they had done this, they enclosed a large number of fish and their nets were breaking. The effect of this upon Simon Peter was that he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.

[30 : 21] Well, the word that is in front of us this morning, the word that we preach to you from this morning is the word of God. I know that the Bible was composed by some 40 different people.

Nevertheless, Paul writing to Timothy, he says, all scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be completely equipped for every good work.

You see, the word that you have in front of you today, they are not the inspired words of men, but words that are God breathed. At the very beginning of the letter to the Hebrews, we are told long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers, by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his son.

Peter sums it all up for us in the second letter, chapter one, no prophecy of scripture comes from someone's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

It was men that wrote, and it was men that spoke, but what they wrote and what they spoke came from God as the Holy Spirit carried them along in their work.

[31 : 44] Martin Luther, he said, let the man who would hear God's word read Holy Scripture. Let the man who would hear God speak read Holy Scripture.

Thomas Watson says, by reading other books, the heart might be warmed, but by reading this book, he needs the Bible, it is transformed.

To his word God has assigned great and precious promises. The prophet Isaiah in chapter 55 wrote about the promise that God gave regarding his word.

So shall my word be that goes out from my mouth. It shall not return to me empty, but it will accomplish that for which I purpose and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

The centurion said, only say the word and my servant will be healed. Simon Peter said, but at your word. Well, I challenge you today and ask you, what is your own relationship with the word of God?

[32 : 51] Is it more than just mere words printed upon a piece of paper? Do you take it as God's word to yourself? Because it is God's word to me and to you.

To the centurion Jesus said, go, let it be done for you as you have believed. And we are told that the said was healed from that very hour.

When Jesus heard this, we're told that he marveled. And he said to those who followed him, truly I tell you, with no one in Israel I found such faith.

God said to you see, what is really important is not our own self assessment, or even the assessment of others, but what God does, what the Lord thinks, what his assessment of me and you is today.

That's what's important. How he looks upon me and you today. What is his assessment of me? What is his assessment of you this morning?

[34 : 01] Here we are brought at the beginning of this chapter to two outcasts, a leper and a Roman centurion. But they both come in faith and both receive the request.

The leper is healed and the centurion's servant is healed. The centurion's faith is at trust in the authority of Christ. And Jesus marveled at the centurion's faith.

And the Greek word here translated marveled to describe Jesus' response to the centurion's faith is also used to describe Jesus' response to the lack of faith in the people of Nazareth, his own city, where he grew up.

The centurion was one of the most unlikely persons to amaze Jesus. He was a Gentile. Doubtless the centurion had a pagan upbringing.

He was a Roman, stationed in Palestine. He was a man of war. But here in Capernaum, he saw a miracle of God's marvelous grace.

[35 : 13] He believed. He believed in the power of Jesus to heal. He came. He made his request to Jesus. And in commending the faith of the centurion, he brings a sharp rebuke upon the Jewish people, and especially upon those of Capernaum.

He said, 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. The children of the kingdom, that's the Jewish people, those who had all the privileges which they despised and they rejected, and what he says, they will be cast out.

Why? Because in spite of all their privileges, they rejected the Messiah. They rejected Jesus. If this morning you are deeply conscious of your unworthiness, maybe you are depressed or distressed because of your sin, Jesus Christ is able and willing to save and wash your sin away, to bring you to be at peace with God, to bring you into a position where you'll be reconciled to God.

Because the atoning work that he got out upon the cross at Golgotha was not an inadequate atonement, but an atonement whose efficacy is limitless.

[36 : 52] He's able to save to the uttermost all those who come to him. Maybe you're saying this morning, oh preacher, if you only knew my sins, if you only knew what I've done, if you only knew my past, well, I don't know your past, but God does.

He knows your past. He knows the sins that you have committed, sins that you may be ashamed of today, sins that may have ended you up in great trouble, but the efficacy of the finished work of Christ is limitless.

He is able to save to the uttermost all those who come to him. The sacrifice and the blood of the incarnate God is today sufficient to wash your sins away, to reconcile you to God, to deal with what your sins deserve, to deal with whatever guilt may be on your conscience today.

He is able to deal with them, if only you were willing, but your unwillingness may be keeping you in the place where you are.

You've heard, you've seen the transformation in the lives of others, but today you're healed in the same place, and that's because of your unwillingness to come to Jesus.

[38 : 22] Well, may your unwillingness not leave you in a place of torment beyond the grave. May you take the example of the centurion and may you come to Jesus even today.

May the Lord bless our thoughts. Let us pray. Eternal and ever blessed Lord, we give thanks to thee today for thy word and for the salvation that you have worked out for sinners such as we are.

And we give thanks today that you are willing to save all those who will come to thee, that we have that promise, that if we come to thee, that thou wilt in no wise cast us out.

And so we pray, Lord, that we may have that boldness and confidence to come to thee today and to receive the healing that we stand in need of. And all that we ask with the forgiveness of our sins in Jesus' name.

Amen. We shall conclude by singing from Psalm 107 at verse 16. That's on page 383. Psalm 107 at verse 16.

[39 : 31] heard and to the sons of men.

We shall sing these verses to the Lord's praise, verse 16 to 21. Because the mighty gates of brass in pieces he did tear. Because the mighty gates of brass in pieces he did tear.

By him is thunder also cut the hearts of iron where.

Whose for their sin and their offense the sore affliction bear.

O guide of which the soul of the poor they do death's gates on the earth.

[41 : 24] In grief they cry to God. He saves them from their miseries.

He sends his word. Then heals on them. From their destruction's breeze.

O that venture the Lord would give grace for his goodness then.

And for his words of wonder done and to the sons of men.

Amen. Amen. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God the Father and the fellowship and communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all now and forevermore.

[42 : 51] Amen.