**Matthew 8:5-13**

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Matthew gives his second account of a specific miracle of Jesus. Jesus heals the servant of a Roman centurion of great faith. Jesus marvels at this centurion’s faith and makes an important and stunning point to His disciples: Gentiles who have faith will participate in the kingdom of heaven alongside the patriarchs, while the sons of the kingdom who lack faith will lose rewards, and be excluded from being honored.

 The parallel Gospel account of this event is found in Luke 7:1-10. A parallel teaching can also be found in Luke 13:28-29.

After Jesus healed the leper, he entered the city of Capernaum. Capernaum is located on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee. It was where Jesus first began His ministry after relocating from Nazareth (Matthew 4:13) and it was where He called John, James, Peter, and Andrew to be His disciples (Matthew 4:18-22).

When he was in Capernaum a Roman centurion came to Him. A centurion was a Roman military officer who had authority over one hundred soldiers. As a Roman, he was a Gentile. And as a Roman soldier in Judea, he was there to maintain Roman power over the Jews. From the perspective of many Jews, Roman centurions were the very enemy that they expected the Messiah would come to overthrow.

This particular centurion had heard of Jesus’s miraculous power and had sought Him out, imploring Him with an urgent request, Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, fearfully tormented. The Roman centurion addresses Jesus (his Jewish subject) with a title of respect—Lord. The centurion’s request is not directly for his own benefit, but for that of his servant. The fact that the centurion would set aside his busy affairs to travel to Capernaum, most likely from a Decapolis city five or more miles away, for the sake of his servant shows a remarkable degree of love for the servant.

The servant is paralyzed but he is not merely unable to move. He is also fearfully tormented, perhaps suffering from a neurological disorder that also caused spasms. The servant is in such bad shape that he is unable to travel or even be brought to Jesus for healing. He is lying paralyzed at home.

Jesus responds to the Centurion—I will come and heal him. Christ is willing to instantly drop and leave all that He was doing in Capernaum to heal a Pagan enemy’s servant. Jesus shows that He practices what He preaches. He is willing to go the extra mile (Matthew 5:41). He loves His enemies (Matthew 5:43), and He greets those who are not His Jewish brothers (Matthew 5:47). He also shows He would be willing to enter the house of a Gentile.

But the Centurion counters with an astonishing reply, Lord, I am not worthy for You to come under my roof, but just say the word, and my servant will be healed. He confesses that he, a Gentile of considerable power and position, is not worthy for Jesus, a Jewish Rabbi, to enter his house. This is a stunning statement of humility. The centurion follows this up with an equally stunning declaration of faith. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed. This centurion has such great faith in Jesus that he is not only convinced that He has the power to heal his servant, he also believes that Jesus does not even need to be present to make this happen. Just say the word, and my servant will be healed.

The centurion goes onto explain, For I also am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. As a Roman military officer the centurion understood how authority worked. He was a man under the authority of his superiors, and he had a hundred soldiers who were under his command. The centurion had a lot of people and responsibilities to manage. He understood that he could not do it all himself, but he could give orders and he knew that his orders would be followed. 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. The centurion reasoned that just as his word carried his authority to his soldiers, so too Jesus’s word had the supernatural authority to heal wherever His word went, so long as it came from Him.

Jesus was impressed. Now when he heard this, He marveled. He turned to His Jewish followers and made an example of the centurion’s amazing faith. Truly I say to you, I have not found such great faith with anyone in Israel. This Roman centurion, this pagan Gentile, this despised enemy of the Jews had greater faith than all of them. His faith put theirs to shame. By highlighting this fact, Jesus was calling His disciples to have this kind of faith, and not only greeting this Gentile, but elevating and praising him.

Before continuing, Jesus repeats the self-reference to His own authority, I say to you. To give their statements greater credibility, Jewish rabbis would ground what they taught in the teachings of learned rabbis in the past. They would begin “Rabbi so-and-so taught…” Citing the authority of former rabbis was a way of giving teachers greater authority for what they were about to teach. Jesus did not teach like this. He simply appealed to the Highest authority there was, which was Himself, which is why He often began His remarks with the phrase I say to you.

Jesus then teaches that in the kingdom of heaven many Gentiles will come from east and west. Gentiles from the east might include Syrians, Arabs, and Persians. Gentiles from the west would include Romans. This might be shocking enough, that the kingdom of heaven would include the likes of a Roman centurion.

But even more surprisingly, some of these Gentiles would recline at the table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are the founding patriarchs of Israel—the ones whom God made His covenant with, from whom He would make a great nation. If the patriarchs are present at this future banquet, they will surely sit at the table of honor. Jesus is telling the Jewish disciples, those who were following Him, that Gentiles (like this centurion) who have great faith, will share honor on the same level of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Gentiles from east and west will participate in the kingdom of heaven and recline at the table and celebrate, rest, and serve at the table of the Patriarchs. Such a notion would have been unfathomable for most Jews. To recline at the table with the most honorable of all Israelites would be reserved for only the guests of highest honor.

But Jesus continues with what would likely have been an even more unsettling thought for His Jewish audience: but the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into the outer darkness. In other words, while faithful Gentiles are honored in the kingdom of heaven because of their great faith, there will be Jews who are sons of the kingdom who will be cast out into the outer darkness for their lack of faith. This might be an illustration of Jesus’ statement later in Matthew: “So the last shall be first, and the first last” (Matthew 20:16).

Jesus uses a definitive term to describe those who will be cast out into the outer darkness. He refers to them as the sons of the kingdom. We know that the sons of the kingdom represent believers. Jesus makes this clear in Matthew 13. His disciples come to Him in private and ask Him to explain the parable of the wheat and the tares. Jesus explains:

“And He said, ‘The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man, and the field is the world; and as for the good seed, these are the sons of the kingdom; and the tares are the sons of the evil one;’”
(Matthew 13:37-38).

Jesus makes clear that the sons of the kingdom are the “good seed”, as contrasted with the “sons of the evil one.” What then would Jesus’s listeners, those who were following Him, have understood about believers, the good seeds, the sons of the kingdom, being cast out into the outer darkness?

The picture Jesus has painted is of the guests of honor reclining at table, at a time of day where there is outer darkness, so it seems an ancient near-eastern banquet dinner is what He is describing. It is nighttime, after the temperature has cooled. At the center table are seated the guests of honor. The less important guests are in seats further from the center table. The further a guest was from the center table, the less honor they had. Also, the further from the center table, the less light there would be. Alas, it appears in this instance, some would not get to attend the banquet at all. They get no honor. They are cast out from attending the banquet. They don’t even get to sit at a table on the outer ring of the banquet. Neither will they be allowed to stand in the fringe of light and eat some scraps. They will be cast into the outer darkness. This describes being excluded from the honor banquet altogether.

The contrast is clear. The Gentiles of great faith from east and west (like the centurion) are seated at the table of honor, basking in glory alongside the honorable Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, while the sons of the kingdom will be cast into outer darkness. Why? Because what is honored in the kingdom of heaven is people who exhibited great faith**.** Jesus is illustrating the point He made to those who were following, saying Truly I say to you, I have not found such great faith with anyone in Israel. The point is that Gentiles like the centurion who had great faith, greater than anyone in Israel, will be seated at the center table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. At the same time, the sons of the kingdom who had not exhibited such great faith would be excluded from honor altogether. It is an extreme contrast driving home the point that faith is what is honored in Jesus’s kingdom of heaven.

Would they care? After all, as sons of the kingdom, they will clearly participate in the kingdom of heaven. But when they are excluded from the banquet, they will be severely disappointed, to the point of mourning like they might at a funeral, by weeping. They will also express gnashing of teeth. The word translated gnashing is derived from a word also translated gnashingin Acts 7:54. After Stephen gives a rousing defense of the gospel, the Jews listening become enraged and “began gnashing their teeth at him.”

“Now when they heard this, they were cut to the quick, and they began gnashing their teeth at him.”
(Acts 7:54)

The phrase “cut to the quick” literally means “had their heart cut in half.” The men who began gnashing their teeth immediately stoned Stephen and killed him. The idea of gnashing of teeth indicates anger, lashing out, disappointment. Therefore, weeping and gnashing of teeth indicates sorrow, disappointment, and perhaps anger and resentment. In this case, it seems likely the gnashing would be at themselves, for not taking advantage of their opportunities.

The phrase weeping and gnashing of teeth occurs seven times in the NT, and in each case is used by Jesus referring to sorrow and disappointment experienced by those being judged.

In this instance, it is sons of the kingdom who experience sorrow and disappointment. They are sad because they are excluded from being honored in the kingdom of heaven for failing to live a life of faith during their life on earth. Instead of being near the center of the banquet, or at the table of honor with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, they are cast into the outer darkness, meaning they are excluded from the banquet altogether. Jesus has been quite clear to this point that if you want a reward from Jesus, then you have to enter the kingdomby following the principles of the kingdom, and the commands of Jesus (Matthew 6:1; 7:13-14; 7:21). This approach to life takes faith; faith that God’s rewards will be superior to the rewards of the world (Hebrews 11:6). Faithful living requires going through the small gate and walking the narrow way (Matthew 7:14).

Jesus creates a stark contrast between the Gentiles from east and west who are being rewarded for their faith, and the sons of the kingdom who are cast into outer darkness to a place where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. To the Jews in the group, this would turn the world on its head; Gentiles are being rewarded at the seat of honor while sons of the kingdom like them are cast into outer darkness. This extreme example makes the point: God will reward faith in the kingdom of heaven without partiality. Further, each believer will care greatly. The rewards will be for faith, and will apply to anyone, even Gentiles.

This is speaking of faith that pleases God. It is impossible to please God without faith (Hebrews 11:4). This is not speaking of the initial faith that made them sons of the kingdom. The word translated here as sons is also used in Matthew 1:23 and is translated “child”: “BEHOLD, THE VIRGIN SHALL BE WITH CHILD AND SHALL BEAR A SON.” To become a child of God only requires believing faith (John 3:14-16). It requires no actions.

“But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name.”
(John 1:12)

Every child or believer eternally belongs in God’s family. They cannot lose their status as God’s child (John 10:28-29, Romans 8:31-39). Whosoever believes in Jesus is born into everlasting life as God’s child (John 3:16) and they are eternally safe from all danger in the eternal Lake of Fire and their eternal future with God is eternally secure because of the work of Christ. They are children of the kingdom. This is a great comfort. Believers do not have to worry about where they will spend eternity after they die, because they have received this grace on account of Jesus, through their faith in Him and His sacrifice (Ephesians 2:8-9).

But while faith alone in Christ alone guarantees that we are safe from eternal damnation in the Lake of Fire, it does not guarantee that we will enter and receive our inheritance in the kingdom of heaven. Wemight be excluded from honor (cast out into outer darkness) and experience disappointment (weeping and gnashing of teeth). It takes obedient faith to win the reward of honor (Matthew 5:19-20, 7:13-14, 21; 1 Corinthians 3:11-15; Philippians 3:7-14; 2 Timothy 2:10-13; Hebrews 10:35-12:17; James 2:14-26; 1 Peter 1:3-9; 2 Peter 1:4-12; Revelation 2:26, 3:21, 21:7; Romans 2:7).

Jesus warns that it is possible to be an eternal child of God and miss the reward of inheritance in His kingdom. Jesus warns that the sons of the kingdom who do not live by faith, will be cast out into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. This is not a reference to eternal damnation in the “Lake of Fire.” That is reserved for those whose names are not written in the Book of Life (Revelation 20:15), who never believed the promise of healing by grace through faith (John 3:14-16).

This is a reference to taking the wide gate that leads to destruction (Matthew 7:13-14). In this case the destruction is of the honor and rewards that could be gained through pleasing God with a life lived doing deeds of faith, like this centurion. That place is the opposite of the rewards banquet. Instead of the warm light of the banquet, there is darkness. Instead of Makarios (blessing), joy, and fulfillment, it is bitter and these sons (who lost their place and reward in the kingdom) will weep and gnash their teeth over the fact that they did not serve others as Christ called them to serve, having consequently lost their inheritance and reward. That is why Peter calls our faith in this life “precious” (1 Peter 1:7); because it is our only chance to know God by faith and receive the reward that comes from faith.

To the believers in Rome, Paul writes:

“But you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, ‘Abba! Father!’ The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.”
(Romans 8:15-18)

When we believe in Jesus, we become children of God. This is irrevocable and eternal. We will live forever with Him. God is our inheritance, since we are “heirs of God” unconditionally (Romans 8:17 a). But to receive our inheritance as an heir of Christ in His kingdom, we must “suffer with Him” by living a life of faith, doing deeds of obedience from the heart. If we do, we are promised an incomparable and glorious reward in His kingdom, to be “fellow heirs with Christ” in reigning in His kingdom (Romans 8:17 b; 2 Corinthians 4:17-18). If we do not, we will be among the sons of the kingdom who Jesus tells His disciples will be cast out into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

After making this dramatic and important point, Jesus said to the centurion, “Go; it shall be done for you as you have believed.” Matthew informs his readers, And the servant was healed that very moment. Jesus completes the illustration of great rewards for faithfulness by granting the petition of the centurion just as he requested.

The order of these first two specific miracles recorded by Matthew is instructive. The healing of the leper might be an illustration of the gift of regeneration from our sins by grace through faith. The leper exhibited the same faith Jesus referenced in John 3:14-16, when He illustrates justifying faith by referring to Israel being asked to look upon the bronze snake lifted on a pole in order to be healed from snake venom. Similarly, Jesus said He would be lifted on a pole (cross) for all humanity to be healed of the venom of sin, the leprosy of sin. The leper believed, and was healed. Each person can similarly be healed from the penalty of sin. This is the great Gift of God, apart from deeds (Ephesians 2:8-9).

This is followed by the second specific miracle of the centurion, which Jesus uses to illustrate that believers will be rewarded for deeds. As Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:10:

“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.”

The key point Jesus drives home is that acting in faith will be the primary criteria for such rewards. It is quite encouraging. The centurion traveled over five miles to make a request on behalf of his servant. In the scheme of things, this is not an enormous deed, yet Jesus said it would be rewarded greatly because of the centurion’s faith. This indicates that each person has the opportunity for great rewards simply by living in faith, and serving others.

**Biblical Text**

**8:5-13 And when Jesus entered Capernaum, a centurion came to Him, imploring Him, and saying, “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.” 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. 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.” And Jesus said to the centurion, “Go; it shall be done for you as you have believed.” And the servan**