

Matthew 8:5-13

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Date: 23 September 2018

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- [0 : 00] We live in a broken world populated by broken men and women, folks like you and me. Our brokenness takes many shapes and forms, broken bodies, broken minds, broken relationships, broken hearts, broken hopes and aspirations, and we could go on. Is any of this fixable? Can we be restored? Can this broken world be redeemed? Can broken people be healed and made whole again? This morning I want to explore a story of healing and restoration, a story that provides a glimpse of one who has the power to heal the sick and lift up the downcast and make whole the broken. We've read the account in Matthew's Gospel in chapter 8, and notice there, if you have your Bibles open, you can follow with me as we make our way through this story. Notice how the story begins.
- [1 : 29] This centurion approaches Jesus as he enters Capernaum, and he approaches him and he speaks to him in this way, "Lord, my servant lies at home paralyzed and in terrible suffering." And so the account begins with this very dark reality of a young man in terrible suffering. Indeed, as we see the parallel account as it's recorded for us by Luke in Luke chapter 7, we're told that the young man was about to die. He was about to die. Not only was he suffering greatly, but he was about to die. He was at death's door. So that's how the story begins, but notice how the story ends. There in verse 13, the story begins with the centurion speaking to Jesus, and it ends with Jesus speaking to the centurion. Then Jesus said to the centurion, "Go. It will be done just as you believed it would." And his servant was healed at that very hour. And so you have this dramatic and wonderful transformation.
- [2 : 38] And we can only imagine the celebrations that ensued in the household of the centurion. When the centurion rushed home, having heard these words, he rushed home to see the reality. And sure enough, there was a servant restored to health. And so, as I say, we can only imagine the happiness, the joy, the celebration from gloom to glee, from despair to delight, from death to life. Now, as we read the account, it would seem that the whole process of transformation, of restoration took only a few minutes, the time it took for this dialogue recorded for us. And perhaps it was a little longer than what we have recorded, but in any event, a relatively short period of time. And yet, in that short period of time, we can identify what we might call steps in the process. Four steps in the restoration of this man, and each of them reveals a human response in a given, or to a given circumstance.
- [3 : 47] We find, first of all, distress and despair in the centurion. But then we're confronted with the resolve of Jesus in the face of that distress.

We're then given an insight into the faith of the centurion in the person of Jesus. And then finally, we're privy to the response of Jesus, a response of astonishment, of amazement at the faith of the centurion.

So, four different responses to circumstances, and each really following one on from the other. But it's looking at these responses that will help us give thought to what we can draw out of this story of transformation as we trace these steps.

Remember that this is a journey from death to life, from death's door to life, from brokenness to wholeness, a journey that men and women continue to walk today.

Perhaps this is a journey that you can embark on, or help others to embark on and walk along. So, first of all, let's notice the distress, we might even say the despair of the centurion.

[5 : 04] Verses 5 and 6, The situation described is a desperate one, and we're brought face to face with a distressed and despairing man, the Roman centurion.

His servant had been struck down by some grave illness that had not only produced paralysis, but had placed him within touching distance of death's door.

As I mentioned a moment ago, in Luke's account, where you have a little bit more said, or some details given that Matthew does not choose to share, we have that stated explicitly.

Let me just read that verse in Luke chapter 7 and verse 2. There's a centurion's servant whom his master valued highly. He was sick and about to die. So, it was a desperate situation, and this was a desperate man.

Now, he had, I'm sure, exhausted all avenues available to a man who would have enjoyed considerable influence as a centurion, as one of the dominating class there in Palestine, a man of considerable financial means.

[6 : 27] Again, Matthew doesn't reveal this to us, but in Luke's account, we're told that this man had built a synagogue for the community. Now, that speaks volumes as to his financial resources.

And so, given these realities, we can only imagine, I think reasonably imagine, that he had employed those resources to try and find a solution, to try and find healing for the servant whom he valued highly, but to no avail.

So, now he appeals to Jesus. This is the sense of the word that we find translated there in verse 5. He came to Jesus asking for help.

He appeals to Jesus. This is the fervent appeal of distressed, yes, even a despairing man. Why was he distressed?

Even as I pose the question, you're maybe thinking, well, you know, what a foolish question. What an unnecessary question. Well, obviously he was distressed because of the condition of his servant that we've just described.

[7 : 36] But I wonder if the question is so foolish as it might appear. Because let me pose another question for you to think about. Why would the centurion care about his servant?

He was just a servant. He was a slave. He was the property of the centurion. And he was a piece of property, certainly in the eyes of the society that that centurion formed a part of.

He was a piece of property whose usefulness was a function of his capacity to work. And he couldn't work because he was paralyzed. He was useless.

He was a burden to the centurion. Instead of contributing to the household, he was taking from the household. He was an expense. That's what he was.

Why would the centurion care about this useless servant? What do you think? Why do you think the centurion cared about this useless servant?

[8 : 46] I use the word useless in its literal sense. He was of no use given his condition. Why do you think he cared? Well, because he loved him.

He loved his servant. And this love that he bears towards his servant is at some levels both scandalous but also sincere and intense. It was scandalous in the sense that masters weren't supposed to love slaves.

And yet we are told, and Luke gives us this detail that Matthew omits, we're told that this servant was valued highly by his owner. And I don't think that language is to be understood in some kind of utilitarian way, that he was a very good servant and a very hard worker.

But he valued him as a person. He valued him as one he cared for and loved. But even if an owner, in the days in which this took place, even if an owner might have had some affection, a liking for a servant, for a slave, in some ways it would not have been in many cases, not unlike the affection that a master might have had for his horse.

This was a man, a military man. You can imagine him maybe being quite fond of his horse. now what happens if a horse is ill to the point of death what do you do with a horse when that happens or what would have been done in these days well we know what would have been done the horse would have been put down you know maybe mercifully and you know trying to avoid as much pain as possible you'd put the horse down that's what you do with a useless horse and and that's what you would have done with a useless servant certainly allowed him to die if not accelerated the process but this centurion loved his servant and he could not bear the prospect of his servant's untimely death and in that way it was in a sense a scandalous love that he bore towards his servant it would have been very unlikely it would have been something that others would have looked on and been perplexed by but it was also clearly love that was sincere and intense it was almost we might say paternal in its characteristics everything would suggest though the language isn't used that he loved this servant like a son can't you hear him as he as he pronounces the words there that he directs to Jesus Lord he said my servant lies at home paralyzed and in terrible suffering we've just got the bold words but but we could we can we can almost hear the the pathos the emotion the intensity of of this centurion as he pronounces those words terrible suffering terrible suffering it's as if the man feels the pain in his own body and soul he's in deep pain he's torn apart what kind of love is this in some ways it's love that doesn't make sense it's love for the unlikely love for those certainly deemed to be unworthy it is love that is deep and intense and does this love not in an imperfect way reflect something of God's surprising love for the unlikely is this not the kind of love we are to show to others the unlikely and broken men and women that God places in our paths and so we witness in the centurion distress distress grounded in love but let's move on to the next step in the journey because in the face of the distress of the centurion we're we're witnesses to the reaction of Jesus a reaction that I'm capturing with the word resolve verse 7 Jesus said to him I will go and heal him so we shift our focus from the centurion to Jesus and this is how he responds he doesn't give the centurion a big hug an empathetic embrace he doesn't try and comfort him with words of sympathy rather what we see is a response of quiet resolve I will go and heal him and even in these brief words I think we can we can draw or we can we can capture identify three things about Jesus in the face of terrible suffering first of all we're struck by the availability of Jesus he is available to this man he doesn't brush him aside he doesn't he doesn't delegate the case to his disciples he doesn't have more important things to do he is available for this man but not only do we see or do we meet an available Jesus we're also struck by the word that I've already used the resolve of Jesus I will go I will go he's at home you're home in terrible suffering well

[14:07] i'll go to your home then also we're struck are we not by the confidence of jesus because he doesn't just say i will go he says i will go and heal him and there's a matter of factness that is quite striking i will go and heal him no ifs no buts no maybes i will go and i will heal him now of course this is a record of events that took place some 2 000 years ago and it may be a heartwarming story it might even be a stirring account but what is its relevance to you today what good is this story for broken men and women today well this same jesus this very same jesus is alive today this jesus died on the cross and was raised again from the grave and is alive today and he is the same jesus today today today today and forever he is still available he is still resolved to answer the cry of broken men and women and he still retains that quiet confidence of one who knows that for him nothing is impossible but as we imagine jesus waiting for the centurion to take the lead in the direction of his home you know jesus has said to the centurion i will go and heal him now you can just pick yourself in the scene and jesus doesn't know where the house is and so when he says those words presumably he's he's waiting for the centurion to say well follow me i'll take you that would have been the logical next step in the story you're willing to come to my home well let's go and so jesus you could imagine just pausing for a moment awaiting the uh words of the centurion to to lead the way in the direction of his home but that's not what happens rather what happens is that we are presented with another response the third step in the process if you wish another response and in this case it's the response of the centurion to jesus and it is a response of faith a response of trust listen to what the centurion says to jesus and how his revert his words reveal his faith in jesus we read there in verse 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 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 and in these words we're presented with a striking picture of the faith of the centurion and we can notice maybe three striking features of it first of all it is a humble faith indeed the very first words that he pronounces in replying to jesus lord i do not deserve or as some translations uh express it lord i am not worthy i'm not worthy for you to come into my home i don't deserve your presence in my home his very first words in in expressing his faith in jesus i am not worthy and the the humility of of that is all the more striking when it is contrast with what was said about him and again this is something we don't find in matthew's account but in luke's account and in chapter 7 we're given an insight into one part of the story that matthew chooses to omit and that is

the part of the story where others had advocated on behalf of the centurion some jewish leaders had approached jesus on behalf of the centurion they're not contradictory accounts but rather complementary accounts but notice what these men had said about the centurion in luke chapter 7 and in verse 4 we read when they came to jesus they pleaded earnestly with him and this is what they said this man this centurion deserves to have you do this because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue and so you have the jewish leaders and their opinion of the centurion is he deserves to be helped he deserves to have you jesus go and heal his servant he deserves it and yet the centurion is of the opposite opinion he says i don't deserve it i'm not worthy so his faith is a very humble faith but it's also and maybe this is the most striking element of it and perhaps what most amazed jesus that it was what we might call a reasonable faith notice his argument the argument that he employs in saying to jesus it's not necessary for you to come to my house we can secure the same outcome or you can secure the same outcome without coming to my house and the argument he uses is on the basis of his understanding of authority he says he gives an example he says i'm a man with authority and i tell one who is under me do this and he does it i tell him go there and he goes why because i have that authority and those who are under my authority do what they're told and clearly this man understood in a way that maybe isn't altogether clear to us that jesus enjoyed the authority of god i don't think we can conclude that this man had a full understanding of the identity of jesus as the eternal son of god but he did recognize that jesus enjoyed the authority of god and exercise authority on behalf of or delegated by god and because of that all he needed to do was say the word and that authority that he enjoyed would ensure the outcome that he was seeking to secure that is his reasonable conclusion he's worked it out he's thought it through his faith was a reasonable faith it's also a confident faith you have the memorable conclusion to what he says at this point in the account or rather the beginning as he introduces the example just say the word and my servant will be healed just say the word and so here is a man who is despairing who is distressed and yet who responds to jesus with this faith that is humble that is reasonable that is secure and confident this is the kind of faith that we are to exercise on our own behalf and on behalf of others but let's just pause for a moment what have we already discovered about the centurion well we've already discovered that his distress is born of or explained by his deep love for his servant we hear a lot of romantic talk or i don't know if romantic is the right word um a lot of talk about the power of love we sing about the power of love and love is good i'm all for love but was it the case that the centurion's deep love the heart of love could secure the healing the wholeness of his servant they couldn't

they couldn't the servant was going to die and regardless of how much the centurion loved him he was still going to die his love didn't have healing power it's commendable we are to reflect it we are to seek to show that kind of love ourselves but the love by itself could not heal the servant could not bring wholeness to the man lying paralyzed and in terrible suffering but that love married to faith in Jesus now that is a different matter altogether there is power when love is married to faith in Jesus when it is accompanied by faith in Jesus and when we look around to the broken lives that surround us and we don't need to look too far we need to ask two questions or we can pose two questions to ourselves as we think about broken lives around us and about us do we love these men and women broken men and women do we love them like the centurion loved his servant but then there's another question we need to ask ourselves is this do you believe that Jesus is able to make them whole when you look at your own broken life whatever form it's broken to whatever extent it's broken however visible that brokenness may or may not be when you look at your own broken life do you believe that Jesus is able to make you whole in his way and in his time and he knows best how to make you whole but do you believe that he is able and willing to do so this man believed in Jesus he had faith in Jesus that Jesus was able and would make his servant whole so we have that third human response one of trust one of faith and faith directed in the person of Jesus but we need to move on and shift our gaze again and we go back from the centurion and his faith in Jesus to Jesus and his response to the centurion's faith and what we're told in the passage is that Jesus's response is one of astonishment or amazement notice there in verse 10 when Jesus heard this he was astonished astonished this astonishment that Jesus experiences is then used by Jesus both to commend the centurion but also to warn his hearers to warn the the complacent the faith of the centurion is commended because it's so unexpected this is what Jesus finds astonishing he says never have I witnessed such faith in all of Israel and yet this Roman centurion this member of the oppressing class the most unlikely man to to to possess such faith I find it I witness it in him and so he commends the centurion he commends him because his faith is so unexpected I wonder if you might be the unexpected one who turns to Jesus maybe you're saying well not for me never me that's not my thing that's not who I am there are people who go that way but not me well perhaps you might be the unexpected one who turns to Jesus or will you be the one who invites the unexpected the unlikely to come to Jesus his faith is commended but Jesus also moves on or or uses his own astonishment as the ground for warning the complacent you see not only

does he commend the centurion for his faith he warns those who do not have that faith in verse 11 he says having said i have not found anyone in israel with such great faith he then goes on to say i say to you that many will come from the east and the west that is from the gentile nations from all over the world the unlikely and the unexpected and the unclean they'll come and they will take their places at the feast with abraham and isaac and jacob in the kingdom of heaven but the subjects of the kingdom those who were closest those who had all the privileges those who had been in church every sunday those who knew the story what will happen to them they will be thrown outside into the darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth those who despite their privileges despite their knowledge failed to put their trust in jesus to turn to him that he might be the one who would make them whole and so be careful because really those of us gathered here we're we're really the the subjects of the kingdom we are the ones at risk of being thrown outside but what does the astonished jesus then do well we know what he does he heals the servant he assures the centurion that that is what has happened and jesus said to the centurion go it will be done just as you believed it would and his servant was healed at that very hour and even in the manner of the healing that is what we might call a twist in the story remember what the centurion asked jesus to do there in verse 8 we we we have the very words of the centurion just say the word and my servant will be healed and and jesus was astonished by his faith and we are astonished by his faith it is indeed a matter of astonishment that he would have such belief in jesus that jesus could by uttering a word at a distance heal the servant that is astonishing faith but the twist is that jesus doesn't even utter a word even a word uttered is not necessary see no word is uttered jesus simply informs the centurion go it will be done just as you believed it would and his servant was healed at that very hour such is the power of jesus just go man just go go home he's there he's already whole he's already healed i don't need to go you're right i don't need to go i don't even need to utter a word the boy is well it is a heartwarming story but what has it to say to you today perhaps you can identify with the distress and hopelessness of the centurion the circumstances may be different the nature of of the broken life that you're concerned about be it your own or that of another but who can you turn to in the midst of terrible suffering you can turn to jesus but there's also a challenge here for those of us who have experienced something of the restoring healing power of jesus in our own lives we live in a broken world surrounded by many in terrible suffering will we be the ones who love them and turn and cry to jesus on their behalf how deep is your love how astonishing is your faith jesus is only recorded as being astonished in the language that we have here in

matthew's gospel he's only recorded as being astonished on two occasions in the gospel that's not to say he was only astonished in two occasions but in the gospel records we only have two occasions when this language is used of jesus that he was astonished or that he was amazed on two occasions on this occasion recorded in both gospels in matthew and in luke's gospel but then also on one other occasion is jesus described in this same manner and we find that in mark chapter 6 and verse 6 and let's just close by noticing the contrast in mark chapter 6 and verse 6 we read and we really need to read from verse 4 to get a sense of what is going on jesus said to them only in his hometown among his relatives and in his own house is a prophet without honor you know we're familiar with that expression he could not do any miracles there except lay his hands and a few sick people and heal them and then we read and it's the same word that is used in our passage and he was amazed he's astonished again at their lack of faith and so you have this striking contrast jesus is astonished on these two occasions once by the faith of the centurion and on the other occasion by the lack of faith of those who should have known better who should have trusted in him and so there's a challenge there for us where are we located among those or with between those two camps let's pray heavenly father we do thank you for your son we thank you for jesus we thank you that he is the eternal son of god the creator of the universe we thank you that he came into this a sin sick world to bring healing and wholeness and salvation redemption to a sin sick broken lost humanity we thank you for the signs of that great work the signs of who he is and what he was about and we acknowledge the miracles to be signs pointing to his identity and to his mission we thank you how this sign points to him as the one who has all power and all authority the one who came to heal the sick and to make whole of the broken and we thank you that that extends to brokenness at every level we thank you that there is a day coming when all physical and mental brokenness will be restored and made whole but we thank you very especially for that brokenness of spirit and of soul that is the result of our sin and of our guilt can also be made whole can also be restored we can be forgiven and made clean by this same jesus and his redemptive work help us then to trust in him help us to love like the centurion help us to trust like the centurion help us to turn to jesus on our own behalf and on behalf and on behalf of others and we pray in his name amen