



FAITH matters

June 30, 2025

The Gospels offer telling insight into the daily life of Jesus among the common people for whom he had deep love and compassion. He taught them with authority, healed the sick, cured the lame, scolded the unscrupulous, fed the hungry, and drew vast crowds. Surely, some came with the hope of receiving a miracle, others likely out of simple curiosity, but many were brought to faith by his message. The numbers of followers grew so large he sometimes took refuge in a boat or withdrew to a different location.

The Jesus problem for the Jewish theological elite at the time, was that this carpenter's son from Nazareth didn't fit the misguided narrative for the expected Messiah. In their presumed righteousness, they didn't like him or believe him; he was a problem and had to be stopped. Hoping to discredit his claims and squelch his popularity, they tried various ways to entrap him while secretly plotting to get rid of him altogether. Meanwhile, the unsuspecting crowds continued to gather whenever Jesus ventured into their towns and villages.

I've long been intrigued by the brief encounter recorded in the 8th chapter of Matthew, between Jesus and the Roman centurion who asked for help for his ailing servant. He wasn't Jewish or tied to the ancient customs and religious practices of the people who were. In fact, he may have found the tedious rituals rather odd. Roman overseers expected to remain distanced from the subjects they ruled. A majority of the local populations didn't trust the Roman government and resented it. He was only there in Capernaum because he had a job to do; an outsider, the enemy.

To his credit, while living among the people, the centurion was paying attention. He must have been aware of the remarkable stories about this

Jesus fellow everyone was talking about. He didn't appear to be like the crafty magicians who performed their feats by slight-of-hand, or the itinerant charlatans who regularly coaxed money for their schemes. No one before had done these kinds of miracles, or spoken with such clarity to anyone who would listen, about the love and forgiveness from a heavenly Father. Jesus also promised the hope of sharing eternal life with him. The Man and the message were compelling. So much so, the seasoned soldier couldn't immediately dismiss the idea that Jesus was indeed exactly who he said he was.

Holding a position of authority himself, he appears to have been a man of reason. He was persuaded by what he saw and heard, and believed. It was a bold move to join the ranks of Jesus' followers that day, not randomly, but with purpose. Capable of making critical decisions and acting, he approached Jesus directly. We're not told how others standing nearby reacted to his presence, we only know how Jesus did. He was astonished. "I tell you the truth, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith." After openly acknowledging it, he mercifully granted the request to heal the servant that same hour.

One can surmise the experience further verified the validity of Jesus as the Son of God in the mind and heart of the Roman centurion, along with others in his household. We can assume this was also true for the disciples, and many among the pressing crowd who heard the words and witnessed the healings of Jesus that day. Such events were impossible to hide because they were real. They were pondered over, discussed or argued about, but more importantly their impact continued to spread drawing even more into the fold.

The story still holds meaning for us today. Jesus will return sometime as promised, but in the meantime, the body of believers here now are His hands and feet and voice in a broken and hurting world. We all come from differing backgrounds, have a wide range of talents and skills, and have a message to tell. Whatever we're called to do, or wherever we go, we may not know when an outsider is observing our behaviors or listening to our words and be drawn to faith in a loving Savior because of us. The mission field is vast, even in our own neighborhoods among those we might least suspect.

~Written by Char Kamper

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