

Matthew 8:5-13

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[0 : 00] Now just to start, I'd like you to have a think about this question. What do you marvel at? What do you marvel at? It's not a word we use often. Perhaps a few of us use it when we're talking about Marvel comics.

But what do you marvel at? What amazes you? What leads your jaw to drop? Can you just stand in silence and awe at something? Just quickly have a think. See if you can think of two things that you marvel at.

Perhaps it's seeing an incredible view of sunrise over snow-capped mountains. Perhaps it's some skill or ability like a triple step over by Ronaldo or a death drop shot at Wimbledon.

Or perhaps it's just the kindness shown to you by someone when you've been feeling down and someone comes around with a pizza and a film. Now what do you think makes Jesus marvel?

The Son of God himself. The one who put the stars in the sky. What makes him marvel? Well have a look at verse 10. Have a look at verse 10.

[1 : 14] Jesus marvels at a man's faith.

Now that is something, isn't it? Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, as this man approached him, spoke to him, marveled. He wondered.

He was amazed at this faith. Now that gets our attention, doesn't it? That makes us want to reread. What's just happened that gets this response from Jesus?

Clearly this is no ordinary meeting. Now we're in a section in Matthew all about the authority of Jesus Christ. At the end of chapter 7 in verse 28, we see that Jesus taught with authority.

Last week when Jesus met the leper, we saw his power and authority over disease. Particularly what makes someone unclean and sin itself. Then later on in chapter 8, Matthew shows us Jesus' authority over nature, over evil.

[2 : 30] But right here in this passage, we see something particular about the authority of Jesus Christ. And also how to respond to him. Because knowing all this stuff about Jesus can leave us wondering, well what does it look like to actually have faith in him?

And that's what we see here in this story. What this faith looks like, that's verses 5 to 9. And then the significance of who has this faith, that'd be 10 to 13.

And Jesus makes something of him being a centurion, but we'll think about that in a bit. But firstly, let's look at what a marvellous faith, one that Jesus marvels at, is like.

And so the first point is this. A marvellous faith magnifies the authority of Christ. A marvellous faith magnifies the authority of Christ.

Now to get into it, we need to spend a bit of time in this story, don't we? Because there are three things the centurion does and says that is massive. So Jesus has come back to his sort of base camp in Capernaum.

[3 : 40] And a centurion comes up to him, appealing to him. Now just imagine this from the disciples' perspective. As this centurion, perhaps in his garb, his official uniform, approaches, they must have been a little bit nervous.

You know, what have we done? You know when you're driving and the police car drives past you, immediately check your speed, you think, have I taxed the car? It's probably a little bit like that.

Sweat appears on your brow. Heart races, increases. And they're probably, you know, expecting a little bit of telling off from the centurion. You know, keep the chatter down. I'm not sure. But instead, as he approaches, they notice he's a little bit frantic.

He's pushing his way through the crowd in a slightly uncharacteristic way. He's a little pale. He comes to Jesus. It's as if he bows before him. He appeals to him, pleading with him.

His voice is frantic. And this is the first moment. He comes to Jesus Christ. We're so used to reading this.

[4 : 45] But this is a Roman centurion has come to this little Jewish teacher for help. Remember, the Romans had conquered this place. This guy was in charge of 60 to 100 people.

He's like an important boss in a company. And he comes to Jesus, this roaming creature, you know, generating a little spur in the area. And he appeals to him.

He talks about his suffering servant, paralyzed at home. But he's not coming here just to inform Jesus. He's coming to Jesus for help. This Roman centurion has come to Jesus.

What does he see in him? Now Jesus responds, I will come and heal him. Again, the idea of a Jew going into the house of a Gentile, that's a big no-no.

It was seen as defiling yourself, making yourself unclean. But rules of uncleanness don't seem to faze Jesus here. Similar to the previous section when Jesus touched a leper.

[5 : 51] But the disciples must have started looking, you know, to each other a little bit awkwardly. Really? Oh, I'm not going. Are you going? I don't know. Are we really going to go to this house? It's sort of a bit like one shock after another.

Perhaps like watching shock tennis, I suppose. A centurion arrives. The mouth opens a bit. Then Jesus says he'll go around. Your mouth opens a little bit wider. But this next comment is a bit, you know, is mouth open, gaping rudely.

A bit like Michael and Mary Poppins, if you've seen it. But this is the second big moment. First, he comes at all. But secondly, he says, Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof.

Well, hang on a sec, Mr. Centurion. You know, what are you talking about? This guy has an extraordinary view of both Jesus and himself. I am not worthy, he says.

Jesus, you're on a whole different plane to me. I'm a ruling Roman centurion. And yet I'm nothing to you. Jesus, you are worthy. You are impressive.

[6 : 56] I couldn't have you come and stay. That's humility, isn't it? That is recognising something about Jesus that brings him to a place of respect.

A place of submission. I said again, what has he seen in Jesus? And then what he says next just goes another step.

Our third moment. He says, but only say the word and my servant will be healed. Only say the word and my servant will be healed.

This centurion believes Jesus can do something that we haven't yet seen in Matthew's Gospel. He believes Jesus Christ can heal someone at a distance by just saying something.

Now that is extraordinary trust, isn't it? He has seen and believed something about Jesus. Again, what has he seen in him?

[7 : 56] Now the disciples and the crowds must have been in utter silence. The centurion has come to Jesus. He's come in humility.

And then he comes with extraordinary trust for Jesus to do something miraculous. Now why? What does this centurion believe?

What does he know about Jesus that leaves such a response? What has he seen in him? Well notice the little word for at the beginning of verse 9.

Let's say because. He's about to explain what he understands. And he says, for I too am a man under authority with soldiers under me. This is all about authority.

The big thing is he understood and believed in the authority of Jesus Christ. He gives a bit of an illustration of what he understood about Jesus' authority.

[8 : 54] He says, you know, when he's a centurion, he had people who were under his authority.

He would say something and they would do it. Servants would obey him. Soldiers would do what he said. You know, but like a boss who says, I'd like that report on my desk by Monday morning.

And it happens. Like that teacher who says, I expect silence in my classroom and gets it. Like the parent who asks their child to pick up their toys and they do it. We understand this type of authority.

Well, even though those of us who are probably teachers, parents, bosses, haven't actually experienced it quite like that, have we? I mean, I can say to my boys, eat ice cream and they do that. But I think that's not quite the point.

But the centurion is showing that this small type of authority that he has points to a far greater authority that Jesus has.

Just say the word and my servant will be healed. Jesus has an authority that far outdoes the centurion and he knows it.

[9 : 57] And his faith is verified by the final verse of the section. Have a look at verse 13. And to the centurion, Jesus said, go. Let it be done for you as you have believed.

And the servant was healed at that very moment. Jesus' words have an extraordinary power. This is a mind-blowing miracle. This is not just like a nice little magic trick. This is something on a whole different level. Jesus spoke and the cells in a man's body a few blocks away repaired. A spinal cord was made whole again. And the servant could walk. He spoke and the illness responded.

He spoke and it was so. Perhaps this reminds you of a very famous part of the Bible. Genesis 1. As God created the universe, he said, let there be light.

[11 : 02] And it was so. He said, let the earth bring forth living creatures. And it was so. This is the power of Jesus Christ. He spoke and it was so.

The man standing in front of the centurion had authority over all things. How big is your view of Jesus Christ?

Is he this big? Perhaps using that phrase in Colossians. Do you believe the world holds together in Jesus Christ, this man?

Do you believe he has words that create, that recreate, that bring life, that are full of the spirit and life? John Frame, a theologian, puts it like this.

He says, without Christ, nothing could be the way it is. But as the world really is. But as the world really is, all its affairs, all its objects and forces trace back to Christ, their creator and governor.

[12 : 11] Although Christ entered history at a particular time and place, he governs all times and places. His person and his work apply to every circumstance in nature and in history.

How big is your view of Jesus Christ? Is he of this significance and authority? And if this is what we know of him, no wonder the centurion responded in the way he did.

The centurion magnified the authoritative Christ. What did that look like? Let's just think back to those three moments. Knowing this authority, the centurion came to Jesus for help.

He was drawn to Jesus Christ. Despite the racial differences, despite the political power differences, he was drawn to the authoritative Christ. Are you drawn to him?

And for the centurion, this is particularly in the context of someone else needing help. Here the centurion's servant. Who do you go to? When you see a friend whose life is a mess, their marriages are falling apart, they're suffering from addiction, whatever it may be.

[13 : 25] Who is your first port of call? Is it yourself? Do you try and fix it? Do you use psychology? Or do you come to Jesus Christ, the authoritative one, in prayer?

Do you point your friend to him? We have a friend from York who's not a Christian. And sadly her marriage is falling apart.

We saw her the other week and it was tragic. It was tragic to hear about what was going on and we were struggling to know quite what to say. What do you say when her husband just isn't around, doesn't lead, doesn't treat her well?

Why should she bother? Well Mary and I realised after our conversation, we realised the solution isn't telling her to try harder. It isn't even counselling, although I'm sure that would help.

No, we have to point her and her husband to Jesus Christ. Without him there is no solution. Without him as their Lord, their efforts will never bring the deep healing that is needed to restore their marriage.

[14 : 32] Do you go to Christ for help? Are you drawn to him? Not only was the centurion drawn to him, but he came humbly. Do you remember he said, Lord, I am not worthy.

And no wonder he came humbly. He knew that Jesus could heal with his words from a distance.

Despite his high position, he knew he has nothing compared to Jesus Christ.

Now I'm sure there are some of us here who secretly think we're kind of a big deal. Whether it's in our work, in our homes, in our social circles, in church.

We know we're good at something. We know people look up to us because of it. We have a little swagger inside, a little heart swagger. You know, we expect to speak to the cool people.

We expect people to listen to us when we have something to say. We expect others to do menial jobs. We rarely ask for help or show weakness. But if that's you, just spend the moment looking at Jesus Christ.

[15 : 40] You are nothing next to him. He can command cells at a distance. He has authority over all things in the universe. And we think we're something.

We need to get perspective. We are not worthy. In the face of Jesus Christ, we are not worthy. We come with empty hands. We come with filthy hearts. We come in rags before the king. Just think, the needs of our world are far beyond us. The needs of our church are far beyond us. We cannot save sinners. We cannot defeat the powers of sin, the world and the devil. We can't even save ourselves. And we can't even stop ourselves in the face of small temptation. Like when I'm trying to work, I still can't even stop myself picking up my phone and scrolling on Twitter.

I can't even control that. I'm nothing before the Lord Jesus Christ. Do we come humbly to Jesus? And thirdly, he came with trust.

[16 : 41] The centurion came with trust. Only say the words and he will be healed. Knowing Christ's authority means he asked Jesus to do the impossible. Knowing Christ's authority means he trusts him.

He asked him. How often do you ask in faith? Ask knowing Christ could do more than you could dream or imagine. Jesus, only say the word and my friend will be healed.

Jesus, only say the word and my sister will be saved. Jesus, only say the word and my colleague will have peace. And know he can. Know the truth of verse 13.

Jesus actually healed this servant. That's why we come together to pray. That's why people talk about the prayer meeting as the engine room of the church. Because it's there we come together in trust of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

It's there we come and say, Jesus, only say the word. And how big our prayers are depends on how big our Jesus is. If Jesus is small, then we don't bother praying.

[17 : 50] If Jesus is as big as this, bring everything to him. Trust him with all things. Don't we want a faith that Jesus would marvel at?

Not for our glory, but for his all the more. So a marvellous faith magnifies the authoritative Christ. And we've seen it in three ways. He was drawn to him.

He came humbly. And he trusted him. But secondly, just more briefly, A marvellous faith matters. A marvellous faith matters.

Let's go back to verse 10. When Jesus heard this, he marvelled and said to those who followed him, Truly I tell you, with no one in Israel have I found such faith. With no one in Israel.

Jesus takes the centurion's faith and turns it onto the people around him. He turns the focus. He turns the heat up. He puts it on those people listening.

[18 : 47] With no one in Israel have I found such faith. All you standing around me. All you of Israel. Where is your faith? And then he raises the stakes and shows us why this really matters.

Verses 11 to 12. I tell you, many will come from the 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 teeth. He shows us why it matters by lifting the curtain on the final act of life. By opening up to us heaven and hell.

The new creation and eternal judgment. He brings into focus the future. And he encourages us. And he warns us. To be included in God's new creation is an incredible thing, isn't it?

A joyful thing. Taste the banquet. He says some will recline with the grapes of our faith. I feel like this translation, recline at table, needs to be said by a Yorkshireman.

[19 : 55] But I won't try it now. Anyway, recline at table. But taste the banquet. He says some will recline with the grapes of our faith. He'll be eating, some will be eating the choicest meats.

Drinking, sipping on those fine wines of the kingdom. Alongside men of faith. In the kingdom of God itself. To be included in that.

Now that is a wonderful thing. But he also warns. To be excluded will be horrific.

It will be hell. It will be darkness. The outer darkness. Than if you've ever experienced being alone in the dark. To be a place of fear.

It's unnerving. A place where you don't know what's going to happen. And then the relief. When a light is switched on. But cast out of the kingdom.

[20 : 52] There will be no light. There will be no relief. Outside of God's goodness. There is nothing good. There is fear.

There is weeping. There is suffering. The Bible uses that phrase of gnashing of teeth. To talk about the acts of those who are wicked. Under judgment they will face what that wickedness deserves. Jesus encourages us. But he warns us. This matters. Where will you be? Will you be at the banquet? Or will you be in the outer darkness?

A marvellous faith matters. Now as Jesus says this. He has a final sting in the tail. He is forcing us to reshape our view of who is in the kingdom and who's out.

At the section before this we saw an unclean leper. Who fell before Jesus. Here we see it's an unclean gentile. Actually a member of the occupying force and enemy. And it's him who has a faith worthy of marvelling at.

[21 : 55] And do you notice it's the outsider who's brought in. Do you notice it's those from the east and the west in verse 11. Those who you wouldn't expect. The gentile.

The outsider is brought in. On that final day they will be the ones in the heavenly banquet. The feast of the new creation. And who will be outside?

Those we assumed who were in. The sons of the kingdom. Those who assumed they'll be fine. Their fate will be hell.

It will be God's judgment. The insider is cast out. This is heavy stuff for a warm Sunday evening isn't it? Jesus is suddenly upping those.

Upping things for those standing around him. And for us. Now perhaps we don't hear the weight of what Jesus has just said. Because we're not first century Jews. Perhaps in modern speak it's a bit like saying this.

[23 : 00] That the prostitute. The terrorist. The sexual offender. The scrounger. They will be at the banquet of heaven. But the pious. The middle class.

The money giving church goer will not. That's the shock. Isn't it? That makes us sit up and listen. How can that be Jesus?

Now I'm not saying living sinful lives is okay. But hopefully what I've said gives us the shock of what Jesus has just said. It's that kind of jolt. It should get us saying how can that be Jesus?

And it's because the way in is faith. Jesus marveled at the faith of the centurion. Whose in has nothing to do with race or heritage.

Has nothing to do with what we did a few years ago. Or what our parents do. Has nothing to do with whether we've been to church lots. However important that is. It has nothing to do with how much we give.

[24 : 02] However much blessing that can bring. No it's whether we have faith in Jesus Christ. It's whether Christ is magnified in us.

It should be like sticking a cattle prod in a sleeping animal. Jesus is saying wake up. Where will you be when I return? At the banquet or cast out?

Do you assume that you are in when in fact you face God's wrath? Do you assume that you are inside when you will be cast out?

It's a searching question isn't it? But how do we know? How do we know? It's by seeing what our security is in.

Ask yourself this. If Jesus said to you why should I let you into the banquet? What would you say?

Have a think now. What would you say? If Jesus said why should I let you into the banquet?

[25 : 02] Now generally our answers start with the word I. I did this Jesus. I was kind.

I tried my best. I was good. I've been part of the IPC. I have sound doctrine. I raise my kids to know Jesus. I go to the CU at school. I've slaved away for you Jesus.

So some assume they're in because of what they've done. Because of what we've done. We've earned our way in. But that is the route to outer darkness. The route to the banquet is through Jesus.

What would the centurion say? Not because I but because you Jesus saved. Because you. And the thing is we can even be tempted to say.

Jesus but I believed. But I had faith. But the problem is our security at that point has become even our own faith. Not who we have faith in.

[26 : 06] It becomes something we do. We assume we're in because we have faith. I've done it.

But no. The answer is not to look more to yourself. To your own faith.

A saving faith looks more and more to Jesus Christ. Our faith is not a thing that opens the gates to the banquet. No. It's Jesus who opens and shuts the gates.

He's the one we trust. If you're worried if you have saving faith or not. Look to Jesus Christ. Come back to him. Our confession of faith puts it like this.

The principal acts of saving faith are accepting, receiving and resting upon Christ alone. He is our Lord and Saviour. Dwell on his authority and love.

Gaze on the glory of his death, resurrection and ascension. Spend time just considering this healing of the paralytic and know only he has the power to save.

[27 : 06] The centurion wasn't spending time gazing at his own faith but he came to Jesus. He trusted Jesus. The route to the banquet is through Jesus Christ.

And knowing there's an eternal destination for us all sharpens our view of that faith, doesn't it? It makes us realise this matters. If you don't know Jesus Christ today, come to him.

Don't delay. Pray to him tonight as your Lord and Saviour. You've assumed you're in but now see your faith has never rested on Jesus Christ.

It was resting on you and what you had done. Come to him. Rest on him. And may Jesus marvel at our faith. A marvellous faith magnifies the authoritative Christ.

May we do that. May we raise our glorious, powerful Lord. And a marvellous faith matters. It matters. Let's pray. Let's pray.