

The Centurion, the Beatitudes Illustrated

ABSTRACT: Almost Immediately after Jesus delivers the Sermon on the Mount and then the sermon on the plain he encounters the Centurion in Capernaum. During that encounter only a few words are said, but those words reveal the character of the Centurion as a man who is emphatically living the beatitudes. By studying how he lives the beatitudes we can see why he is a man of such great faith.

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Introduction

In Matthew 5 through 7 Jesus sits and teaches the Sermon on the Mount. This is probably taught to Jews in Aramaic. This is immediately followed by Jesus standing for the sermon on the plain where Jesus teaches Gentiles almost certainly in Greek (Luke 6:17-49). After completing this second talk Jesus enters Capernaum (Matt 8:5 and Luke 7:1) and encounters a leper and then the centurion this study will focus on.

What the Scripture Says

Matthew 7:28-29 When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, 29 Because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.

Matthew 8:1-13 when he came down from the mountainside, large crowds followed him. 2 A man with leprosy came and knelt before him and said, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean." 3 Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" Immediately he was cured of his leprosy. 4 Then Jesus said to him, "See that you don't tell anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the gift Moses commanded, as a testimony to them." 5 When Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him, asking for help. 6 "Lord," he said, "my servant lies at home paralyzed and in terrible suffering." 7 Jesus said to him, "I will go and heal him." 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. 9 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." 10 When Jesus heard this, he was astonished and said to those following him, "I tell you the truth, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith. 11 I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. 12 But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." 13 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.

Luke 7:1-9 When Jesus had finished saying all this in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum. 2 There a centurion's servant, whom his master valued highly, was sick and about to die. 3 The centurion heard of Jesus and sent some elders of the Jews to him, asking him to come and heal his servant. 4 When they came to Jesus, they pleaded earnestly with him, "This man deserves to have you do this, 5 Because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue." 6 So Jesus went with them. He was not far from the house when the centurion sent friends to say to him: "Lord, don't trouble yourself, for I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. 7 That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you. But say the word, and my servant will be

healed. 8 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.” 9 When Jesus heard this, he was amazed at him, and turning to the crowd following him, he said, “I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel.” 10 Then the men who had been sent returned to the house and found the servant well.

The Beatitudes Focusing on the Centurion

Matthew 5:1-16 Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, 2 And he began to teach them, saying:

3 “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

The Centurion did not consider himself worthy to have Jesus come into his home. He was not Jewish so according to the Pharisees interpretation his house would have defiled Jesus.

4 Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Mourn—He was concerned about his servant who was paralyzed and in terrible pain. It was his mourning for his servant that triggered this whole incident.

5 Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Meekness—tame—easily led—controllable as a stallion charging into battle does it follow the instructions of its rider. If it does without hesitation then it is meek. He was a man under authority so presumably he does what he was told as he expects those under him to do what they are told. The Greeks value meekness highly as long as there is a compensating strength.

6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Many of the Jews hate the Romans—but here we have the Jewish synagogue leaders pleading the centurion’s cause because he was such a good guy. He was obviously someone hungry after righteousness. He was responsible for the financing of the building of the synagogue in Capernaum. He was intimate enough with the synagogue rulers that they were willing to go out of their way to help a Roman gentile. Religious Jews would have nothing to do with a gentile, which was especially true of Pharisees—they would have nothing to do with most Jews much less gentiles.

7 Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

Merciful—is an attitude arising out of a mutual relationship in this case for example a master and servant. This is a kindness owed in mutual relationships. The Hebrew is hesed—loving kindness—covenant mercy—the mercy that God extends to us. The centurion was concerned for his servant who was paralyzed and in terrible suffering.

8 Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

This could also be translated clean of heart. The Jews looked down at gentiles because they were unclean, that is they did not follow the Jewish cleanliness laws. This describes a man who was clean on the inside in his heart much like being circumcised in heart is better than

being circumcised in body. He did not consider himself worthy to come to Jesus and so he did not meet Jesus, but he would see God.

9 Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.

Peacemaker—the job of a centurion was to maintain the peace. He was soldier trying to prevent terrorism. The Sacarii were assassins or terrorist that wandered Israel trying to kill off the soldiers. He was a leader of an occupying force, yet he was loved by the people. He controlled to the point they were greatly concerned for his needs.

10 Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. **11** “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. **12** Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

The Roman soldiers were persecuted by the terrorists for maintaining the peace. That is much as the U.S. marines are being persecuted in the cities of Iraq for trying to maintain the peace in those war torn cities.

13 “You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men.

The centurion by his actions made Capernaum a more pleasant place.

14 “You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. **15** Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. **16** In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

All who encountered this centurion saw the good he did and the attitude that he had.

Jesus says we are not to lay up treasure where moth and rust can destroy—this centurion was investing his money in building a synagogue a house were the Jews could worship.

The time and place of Jesus’ encounter with the centurion was ordained by God for our instruction. This centurion was there as an illustration of the message of the beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount that Jesus had just taught. Jesus was new to Capernaum, but most of the citizens of Capernaum would have been familiar with this man. One’s faith is evidenced by how one has ordered their life. This centurion ordered his life to please God and so evidenced great faith. He did this by living the Beatitudes.