

5 July 2026

The Believing Centurion

Lesson Text: Matthew 8:5-13



Key Text: *When Jesus heard it, He marveled and said to those who followed, “Verily I say unto you, I have not found such great faith, no, not in Israel.”—(Matthew 8:10 NIV)*

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, we will be able to:

1. Identify the centurion’s appeal to Jesus.
2. Explain why the centurion’s “great faith” is astonishing.
3. List ways to practice intercessory prayer and appeals to Jesus as an act of faith in God’s power.

Lesson Text Matthew 8:5-13

⁵ And when Jesus had entered into Capernaum, there came unto Him a centurion, beseeching Him

⁶ **and saying, “Lord, my servant lieth at home sick with the palsy and grievously tormented.”**

⁷ And Jesus said unto him, “I will come and heal him.”

⁸ **The centurion answered and said, “Lord, I am not worthy that Thou shouldest come under my roof. But speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed.**

⁹ For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me. And I say to this man, ‘Go!’ and he goeth; and to another, ‘Come!’ and he cometh; and to my servant, ‘Do this!’ and he doeth it.”

¹⁰ **When Jesus heard it, He marveled and said to those who followed, “Verily I say unto you, I have not found such great faith, no, not in Israel.**

¹¹ And I say unto you, that many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the Kingdom of Heaven.

¹² **But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”**

¹³ And Jesus said unto the centurion, “Go thy way, and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee.” And his servant was healed in that selfsame hour.

Introduction

Young children run to their parents when something is amiss. They fully expect that they can fix whatever has gone wrong: a broken toy, a skinned knee, or a swing that won't push itself. In their eyes, we are the big, experienced adults who have been there for them since they were born. In their eyes, we seem completely trustworthy and capable of doing whatever they need. (They're still young enough to be enchanted by our capacity!) This trust is constant—whether they are behaving well or poorly, whether they are healthy or sick, whether we are full of energy or exhausted. If children can place this radical trust in an earthly parent, how much more might the children of God run to a faithful and capable heavenly Father! Yet, we often hesitate to bring specific requests or intercessions. We waver when we feel unworthy of attention or that our situation is too much. But, as with the centurion in Matthew 8:5–13, we can trust God's ability and

willingness to act. God will respond when we come to him, full of faith. God does not tire.

Lesson Context

Today's lesson takes place soon after the Sermon on the Mount. In Matthew 5–7, Jesus gives a clear interpretation of the Torah, or Jewish Law, and explains the values of God's kingdom. In this sermon, Jesus calls himself "Lord," showing that everyone owes him obedience and loyalty (7:21–23). He compares his teachings to a foundation stone (7:24), saying his words are like solid ground that gives stability to those who follow them (7:24–27). After Jesus comes down from the mountain, a man with leprosy approaches him (Matthew 8:2). The Torah, which Jesus just showed he can interpret, has purity laws about contact with sick people. Anyone with a visible disease faced daily struggles and risked making others ritually impure. The man's request for cleansing shows his faith in Jesus' power over sickness and death. When Jesus heals the man with a touch, he accepts ritual impurity (8:3) and shows he can heal the diseases that the Law of Moses addressed. This healing by touch prepares for another healing that happens without physical contact.

The Centurion's Request

Capernaum was the main center for Jesus' ministry in Galilee (Matthew 4:13). Simon Peter lived there, along with probably a few other disciples (17:25). The name "village of Nahum" fits Jesus' work well, since Nahum means "comfort" in Hebrew. This matches Jesus' mission to bring comfort to Israel, as seen in Isaiah 40:1: "Comfort, comfort my people, says your God." The village's name also refers to the prophet Nahum, who predicted judgment against Nineveh and Assyria (Nahum 1–3). A centurion was a Roman army officer in charge of 60 to 100 soldiers. Since Rome did not have a legion stationed in Galilee or Judea at that time, this centurion was probably part of the auxiliary troops under Herod Antipas. These troops were made up of non-citizens, mostly recruited from the free people of the empire. The centurion might have come from Galilee, Phoenicia, or Syria, so he was neither a Roman citizen nor Jewish. He comes to Jesus as someone asking for help and recognizing Jesus' authority. In the similar story in Luke 7:1–10, the centurion does not go to Jesus himself but sends Jewish elders to speak for him. This shows he felt unworthy to approach Jesus directly.

The centurion calls Jesus Lord, a title that can mean a human ruler, an honorific like "mister," or even refer to God. God-fearers, or non-Jewish followers of God, often used "lord" or "master" to avoid saying the sacred name Yahweh. In Matthew's Gospel, "the Lord" usually refers to God (Matthew 1:20; 2:13; 4:7; etc.). Just one chapter before this story, Jesus uses "Lord" for himself (7:21–22). This makes it important that the centurion, who is both an outsider and a symbol of Roman power, approaches Jesus with respect

and repeats this title. At the very least, the word shows honor and recognizes authority. The centurion does not bring his servant to Jesus for healing. By leaving the servant at home, he shows how much faith he has, believing Jesus can heal from a distance. The word "servant" here is unclear and could mean a child or an enslaved person. One possible explanation is that the "servant" is the centurion's son by a woman he is not legally married to, perhaps someone of lower status or an enslaved woman. Roman soldiers at that time were not allowed to marry while serving, but the rules were often ignored. Soldiers who served in one place for a long time sometimes had unofficial families. After their service, they could formally adopt children who were not legally recognized before. Since the centurion is of higher rank and likely had a long-term post, this idea fits with Luke's Gospel, which says the sick person is "valued highly" (Luke 7:2–10).

Jesus' Offer

Jesus lives out his own teachings. In the Sermon on the Mount, he tells people to love others, even their enemies (Matthew 5:43–44). God gives good gifts to everyone, both the righteous and the wicked (5:45). Because of this, Jesus assures his followers that anyone who seeks and asks will find and receive (7:8).

Christ's kingdom is not like earthly kingdoms that conquer by force. Instead of resisting someone who might seem like an enemy or oppressor, Jesus chooses to serve and bless him. In Luke's version of the story, Jewish elders speak up for the centurion, saying he is not an enemy. They say he is worthy because "he loves our nation and has built our synagogue" (Luke 7:4–5). Jesus then asks the centurion, "Shall I come and heal him?" This shows that Jesus is willing to go and heal when asked. By using the word, I, Jesus makes his willingness clear. He checks if this is what the centurion wants: "You want me to come?" This is like the question Jesus later asks the young man in Matthew 19:17: "Why do you ask me about what is good?... There is only One who is good." Everything Jesus says shows who he is and the authority he has.

Centurion's Response

The centurion repeats the title Lord, echoing what Jesus said earlier. He shows strong faith in Jesus' authority by saying that Jesus only needs to speak for something to happen. In Genesis 1, God creates simply by speaking. For example, God says, "Let there be light," and light appears (1:3). So, whether he means to or not, the centurion's faith connects Jesus to the Creator, whose words bring life. Some people argue that when the centurion says, 'I do not deserve to have you come under my roof,' he is thinking about how Jews might avoid entering a Gentile's home. But this idea overstates how strict

Jewish purity rules were in the first century. Becoming ritually impure was not considered sinful, and sometimes it was even required by the Law. For example, if a close relative died, burial had to happen within twenty-four hours, as Deuteronomy 21:23 is traditionally understood. Most Jews at that time spent much of their lives in a state of ritual impurity. Only those going into holy places, like the temple courts, needed to purify themselves. Simply entering a Gentile's house was not a problem. Jewish writings and rabbinic sources show that Jews would enter Gentile homes without worry, even to share a meal, as long as the food was not forbidden.

The Centurion's Position

The centurion talks about his understanding of authority and his experience as a military leader. He points out that soldiers follow his orders, using this as an analogy to show Jesus' place in the cosmic hierarchy. Just as the centurion commands his troops, Jesus has the authority to command the powerful, unseen forces of heaven.

The centurion describes himself as someone under authority. His orders matter because he speaks with the emperor's backing. In the same way, Jesus' authority over all things comes from the Father in heaven. As Jesus says in Matthew 28:18, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (compare John 5:36)

Jesus Surprise

Jesus is amazed by the centurion's faith. In this context, faith means more than just belief; it also involves trust and loyalty. The centurion recognizes Jesus' authority and fully submits to him. He believes that Jesus can and will help him. Jesus is struck by this strong trust and submission, saying he has not seen anything like it even in Israel.

Even though the people of Israel have the witness of the law, which the apostle Paul calls "the very words of God" (Romans 3:2), they do not show this level of trust and submission. The centurion's active faith surprises Jesus. As a Gentile, the centurion does not have these advantages, yet his faith recognizes the presence and authority of God in Jesus.

Inclusion of Outsiders

Jesus uses the centurion's faith as an example for others to follow. He explains that people from outside the community who trust him like this will be welcomed into God's kingdom with the patriarchs. The kingdom of heaven means that God's rule is active in the world. It also includes the resurrection of the dead and the renewal promised to Israel. Jesus makes it clear that God welcomes outsiders, like the centurion, as part of the

faithful. In this new era of justice and life, many will be rewarded and treated as heirs to God's promise, right alongside Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Outsiders come from places far from Israel, both east and west. These directions show that God's kingdom is open to people everywhere, even from the farthest nations. The psalmist uses the phrase "as far as the east is from the west" to poetically describe infinite space (Psalm 103:12), and Jesus' words do something similar. He encourages his listeners to think more broadly about who can enter the kingdom. Sitting with the patriarchs brings to mind a great feast, and Jesus wants his disciples to imagine who might join the wedding banquet of the Lamb (Revelation 19:6–9).

Exclusion of Others

In contrast, those who are unfaithful will be expelled. Their punishment for disobedience, lack of faith, and apathy is being excluded from the kingdom's benefits; they will be left outside. Imagine how shocking Jesus' words must have been. People who assume they will be included because of their background should be careful. Jesus warns that those who rely on family history or religious ties for automatic entry into the kingdom could end up outside, in darkness. Unfaithfulness and infidelity have serious consequences. This teaching echoes Amos 5:18–20, which says the day of the Lord's judgment will be "darkness, not light" for the house of Israel.

The phrase 'weeping and gnashing of teeth' often appears as figurative language in the Psalms. David talks about mockers who plot against him and gnash their teeth (Psalm 35:15–16). In that passage, these people are at a feast, which connects to what Jesus says about sitting with the patriarchs (see earlier comments on Matthew 8:11). Another psalm describes the wicked making plans against the righteous (Psalm 37:12). Even though they gnash their teeth, God will stop them and their plans (37:20). Psalm 112 shows the righteous looking forward to a lasting future, filled with honor (112:9). On the other hand, those who turn away from God will see others honored, feel upset, gnash their teeth, and eventually fade away (112:10). So, when Jesus uses this phrase, it points to the bitterness and anger of those who see the righteous being saved. It serves as a warning to avoid a cold or faithless attitude, since that only leads to ruin.

Healing from a Distance

Jesus shows the divine authority the centurion expected. He heals the servant from a distance, and the healing happens instantly, right then. Jesus then tells the centurion to go. His words, "Let it be done just as you believed it would," are especially important. Jesus does not act alone. In Matthew 13:58, he refuses to perform miracles when people lack

faith. But for the centurion, his strong faith shapes what he receives from Jesus. God answers directly in response to the centurion's request.

Jesus does not focus on the centurion's appearance, social standing, background, or even his place in the community. Instead, he pays attention to the centurion's faith. This moment shows how God can give the "desires of your heart" to those who pray according to his will (Psalm 37:4). It brings John's words to life: "If we ask anything according to his will, he hears us" (1 John 5:14). When we trust God, we can seek, ask confidently, and receive a just reward.

The Charge

Now we reach the second part of the exchange between Amos and Amaziah. Amos starts by explaining what he does for a living. He says he is not the son of a prophet, which means he does not come from a prophetic school like those mentioned in 1 Samuel 19:18–21 and 2 Kings 2:3; 4:38; 6:1–2; 9:1.

This suggests he speaks on his own and is not tied to any group or person. Amos's background is in farming. The word for shepherd here is different from the one in Amos 1:1 and is very rare; this is the only place in the Old Testament where this Hebrew word appears. The Greek version, the [Septuagint](#), also uses a rare word. It likely means someone who looks after livestock. Using these two rare words together may show that Amos was a businessman. He also took care of sycamore-fig trees, which adds to his experience. These trees were common in the area in ancient times ([1 Kings 10:27](#); [1 Chronicles 27:28](#); [Luke 19:4](#)). Amos does not need to prophesy to earn money, since he already has his own job.

Amos does not want to be a prophet. He is not trying to speak out against Amaziah, Jeroboam, or the people of northern Israel. Instead, God called Amos and told him to deliver a message. Amos 7:14 shows that he was not motivated by money. It is also clear that Amos is not acting as a political agitator. He is speaking for God. This makes Amaziah's opposition to Amos even more serious. Amaziah is not just resisting one prophet or a group of prophets; he is standing against the Lord, the God of Israel. Since Amaziah represents his king and the people of northern Israel, their rejection of Amos's words is really a rejection of God's message.

Conclusion

The centurion in today's lesson gives us a refreshing example of approaching God properly. Our methodology is critical as we intercede for those who are suffering. The centurion showcases essential aspects of a faithful petition: acknowledge Jesus as Lord, submit to God's authority, and do so with great humility. The centurion also appeals to the Lord's mercy. He holds complete confidence in Jesus' ability to alleviate suffering, even from a distance. This story demonstrates that we can be confident like the centurion—in Christ's authority over sickness, death, and every power.

Take Aways

Closing Prayer



Daily Bible Readings*

(*Liturgical Color: Green (Life, growth, and hope)

Monday: Seeking Out Jesus: Read: [Matthew 8:5-6](#), Theme: Impressive faith actively seeks Jesus in times of distress. **Reflection:** The Centurion had the resources of the Roman Empire, yet he chose to seek out a Jewish teacher for his paralyzed servant.

Tuesday: Revering Jesus, Read: [Matthew 8:7-8](#), Theme: Recognizing the holiness and authority of Christ. **Reflection:** Despite being a high-ranking officer, the Centurion felt profoundly unworthy for Jesus to enter his home.

Wednesday: Understanding Authority, Read: [Matthew 8:9](#), Theme: Submitting to the ultimate power of God. **Reflection:** The Centurion understood military command: he followed orders and gave orders. He recognized that Jesus possessed this exact, unquestionable authority over sickness and the natural world.

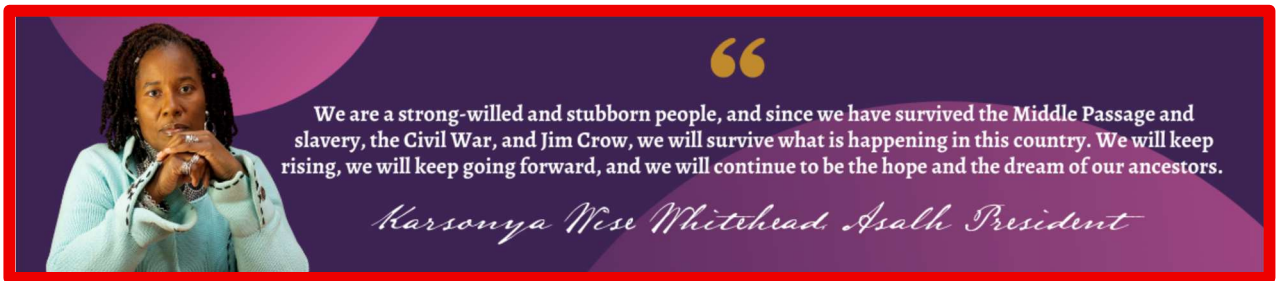
Thursday: Marvelous Faith, Read: [Matthew 8:10](#), Theme: Pleasing God through confident belief. Reflection: Jesus was genuinely amazed by this Gentile's faith. The Centurion believed Jesus didn't even need to be physically present to heal.

Friday: The Global Kingdom, Read: [Matthew 8:11](#), Theme: God's expansive, welcoming grace. Reflection: Jesus prophesies that people from all directions will join the kingdom, opening salvation to the Gentiles (non-Jews). Consider how this shows that God's love breaks through cultural and ethnic barriers.

Saturday: The Danger of Presumption Read: [Matthew 8:12](#), Theme: The danger of missing the kingdom despite growing up "in the faith". **Reflection:** Jesus issues a stark warning to religious insiders who take their heritage for granted.

Sunday: The Word of Power, Read: [Matthew 8:13](#), Theme: Seeing prayers answered according to your belief. **Reflection:** Jesus honors the Centurion's request instantly with a single word. His servant was healed in that exact hour.

BLACK HISTORY



How Black Americans Co-opted the Fourth of July

By: [Livia Gershon](#) July 3, 2020



After the Civil War, white southerners saw the Fourth of July as a celebration of Confederate defeat. Black southerners saw opportunities.

The meaning of the Fourth of July has changed over time and place. In the years after the Civil War, historian [Brian D. Page](#) explains, it became a holiday celebrated mainly by Black residents in Memphis.

Mr. Page starts his account in June 1862, when U.S. forces took control of Memphis. Many formerly enslaved Black people soon moved into the city, and the Black population grew from 3,882 in 1860 to 15,525 in 1870. The Army stationed Black soldiers in Memphis, which upset many white residents. In 1866, the *Memphis Daily Avalanche* claimed that having Black soldiers there “corrupts the whole Negro population of the South; it puts before their eyes a picture of their race, which raises their expectations above all reason and discontents them with the plain tasks of labor.”

For many white residents in Memphis, the Fourth of July became linked to the Confederacy’s defeat and the presence of Black soldiers. In 1869, a local newspaper noted that the holiday was celebrated “only by our [Germans](#) and our colored citizens.”

For Black Americans, the Fourth of July took on a new meaning. In 1852, Frederick Douglass gave a well-known speech that compared the promise of Independence Day to the reality of slavery. After gaining freedom, many Black people hoped they could finally claim the rights promised by the Declaration of Independence.

According to Page, the first Black Fourth of July celebration in Memphis happened in 1866, only two months after white mobs killed forty-six African Americans in the Memphis massacre. Every year, mutual aid groups like the Sons of Ham and the Daughters of Zion organized events with traditional Black American activities, including barbecue and late-night dancing. These celebrations attracted thousands of people from Memphis and nearby areas.

The July 4 parades included bands, groups from the mutual aid societies with their own flags, banners, and special clothing, and military groups like the M’Clellan guards. Sometimes, women marched separately from men or rode in carriages.

Page notes that both leaders and participants, including many day laborers, housekeepers, other low-wage workers, and professionals, valued order and formal dress. He writes, “The attention to order and appearance in these celebrations was as much a self-conscious attempt to gain respect in society as it was a reflection of the standards of contemporary celebrations.” Most parades were held outside Black neighborhoods to show participants’ equal rights to the city center. In 1878, one parade featured the M’Clellan guards in a military drill. At Independence Day picnics, speakers encouraged African Americans to help build churches and schools and to claim the rights promised by the Declaration of Independence.

In the 1870s, the political climate shifted when the federal government ended Reconstruction, and Memphis leaders dissolved the city's charter, reducing Black voting power. By the 1890s, white southerners had started celebrating the Fourth of July again. However, Page explains for Black Memphis residents, it “once again became a far-off promise of equality as the words of the Declaration of Independence were voiced but proved to have little meaning in the Jim Crow South.”

Association for the Study of African American Life and History

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The Negro Historical Association with Carter Woodson (with bow tie) seated next to Mary Church Terrell (in white) in front row, center, of this portrait (1925). Source: Courtesy of the Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University Archives, Howard University, Washington DC

We are in the final stages of organizing the Northern Virginia Branch. Interested, contact: *Deac Joe Boutte, Bro Harvey Woodson, or Rev Gillis M. Taylor.*

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