

THE FAITH OF THE CENTURION

After Jesus had finished His teaching to the multitudes, He returned to the city of Capernaum. Luke had earlier mentioned Capernaum previously in chapter 4, verse 31. On that occasion Jesus had gone to the synagogue, where He cured a man possessed by a demon. That very synagogue had been built by the Roman centurion who figures in our Gospel reading for today.

The word *centurion* means “captain of a company of one hundred soldiers.” Since Herod Antipas was the ruler of Galilee, in which province Capernaum was located, this centurion may have been in Herod’s service in some official capacity. A warm feeling had developed between this centurion and the Jewish elders who had charge of the synagogue.

Several times Luke has reported Jesus healing numbers of sick without going into detail (4:40; 6:18, 19). Here he gives us the full story for several reasons: this centurion was no doubt a Gentile, and this man shows great faith in the power of Jesus’ word. He is a model for the many gentile believers who would be coming into the church in future years.

The delegation of Jewish elders, sent by the centurion to beg help for his critically ill servant, told Jesus that “he *deserves* to have You do this for him.” They were thinking of the love this man had shown to the Jewish nation.

But the centurion felt no worthiness. As Jesus came near his home, he sent friends to say, “Lord, do not trouble Yourself! For I *do not deserve* that You should come in under my roof.” Because of his feelings of unworthiness, he had not come to Jesus originally; he had sent the delegation of Jewish elders. (Here Luke gives a fuller account of this story than we find in Matthew 8:5-13.)

The centurion goes on to declare his great confidence in the word of Jesus. It was not necessary for Jesus to touch the sick servant (as the sick had sought to touch Jesus in 6:19). Even as the centurion commanded those under him with a word, so Jesus need only speak the word and the servant would be healed.

Now it is Jesus’ turn to be amazed! Many had been astonished at what Jesus had said and done. The faith of this centurion causes Jesus to marvel (Luke uses a Greek word which has that meaning). The faith of this Gentile was greater than any Jesus had found among the people of Israel. The healing that Jesus effects is not nearly so celebrated in this story as the marvelous faith of the centurion. Here also is a miracle! We would do well today to likewise celebrate the marvelous miracle of faith that the Spirit works through the Word!