

Series: Jesus' Unexpected Heroes
“THE FAITHFUL SOLDIER”
Sunday, September 6, 2009 AM Perth Bible Church
Rev. Todd G. Leupold

INTRODUCTION:

As we launch a new series, I would like us to consider what does it mean to be a hero? What does or doesn't make someone a hero in your eyes? Would everyone else agree with you? Why or why not?

A young girl in the 2nd grade was given an assignment to write about her personal hero. When he heard he had chosen him, her father was greatly flattered. Curious, he asked her, “Why did you pick me?” With those big, tender eyes that melt every father's heart she replied, “Because I couldn't spell Arnold Schwarzenegger.”

We laugh, but is the criteria we apply always that much better? Are personal heroes any more well known?

What about Jesus? Could One who is Himself absolutely and infinitely perfect, good, all-powerful, all-knowing, and ever-present be astonished by someone of His own creation? If so, what could possibly constitute such a character and circumstance?

Or, to put it another way, if Jesus were to create His own human superhero, what would such a person be like?

In the next several weeks, we will look together at Scripture and see that there actually were several people who uniquely caught Jesus' attention and received His elevated praise. As we do, I will challenge each of us to recognize what it was that so pleased Jesus and to commit to be like that ourselves to His pleasure and glory!

We begin with who I refer to as: “The Faithful Soldier.”

SCRIPTURE 1: Matthew 8:5-13

PRAYER

SCRIPTURE 2: Luke 1:1-10

Two Accounts, **One** Event

- Both of these accounts refer to the same event and are confirmed God-breathed inerrant Scripture direct from God Himself.
- **Why, then, twice?** Many accounts of Jesus' ministry are referred to by more than one of the inspired gospel writers. Each has been inspired by the Holy Spirit in order to present these events, words and truths as seen through equal but separate and distinct perspectives.
- **Why does Matthew seem to indicate the Centurion came to Jesus himself, but Luke describes Jewish elders approaching Jesus in place of the Centurion and on his behalf?**
- Matthew's gospel is focused on presenting Jesus as the unmistakable Savior and King of All. As such, when describing examples of Jesus' words and actions that particularly emphasize His unique power and authority as Savior and King, Matthew's accounts poignantly cut right to the heart and point, eschewing any unnecessary technical details. It was also written with a Jewish audience in mind and Jewish literature and communication is known for emphasizing key points and leaving details to be understood through inference or prior knowledge.

- Luke, by contrast, wrote his gospel primarily with a Gentile audience in mind. Thus, he seeks to communicate to the Greek mind, which values detailed, comprehensive, logical and orderly communication. Luke's thematic purpose for his gospel was to strengthen the readers' certainty in the truth of what has been taught. This further requires a more detailed, leave little out, type of reporting.
- **What, then, are we to believe really happened?**
- As to the details, we are to accept Luke's account that the Centurion did not come to Jesus personally, but sent the Jewish elders on his behalf. As such, they fully represented the Centurion. The reason the Centurion likely did this is that he didn't want to leave the side of his servant who was suffering in torment. In this time and culture (and especially among the Hebrews), this was accepted as being the same as talking directly to the principal person and Matthew's description of the event as if it was the Centurion himself would have been a completely acceptable summary.

With this potential stumbling block explained, let us then focus in on the significance of the fact that we have here an example of someone whom Jesus Himself proclaims a hero.

HE IS JESUS' HERO BECAUSE HE DEMONSTRATES FAITH THROUGH:

I.) PASSION FOR OTHERS

- The faithful soldier's concern is not for himself, but for another.
- Even more significant, it is concern for one that most would not care about so much.
- In the other accounts of someone coming to Jesus for healing, the requests are for oneself, a child or parent. But, here, the faithful soldier is passionate about the well-being of *his slave!* A person often not seen by those of the Centurion's stature as even being a person, but as replaceable property or at best a hired hand.
- *Not so the Centurion. His heart pounded with passionate concern for one he recognized as a fellow human being, regardless of status or relationship!*

II.) PERSUIT OF CHRIST

- The faithful soldier recognizes that there is only One who can possibly change this situation and heal this person. Only One who has the power and authority to change these circumstances. Further, even as a Gentile and occupying soldier, he recognizes that this One is Jesus of Nazareth who embodies and possesses the power and authority of God Almighty!
- He didn't seek out the medical experts, the philosophers, the government officials or the rich and famous. He sought out the power and grace of the Lord of Lords and settled for nothing less!
- *What about us? When you have a need, concern, or difficult circumstance, where do you turn? Where do you seek help and solutions? Is Jesus your first option, your last, or somewhere in between?*
- At the same time, he does not sit or dally around and wait for Jesus to come to him. Rather, the faithful soldier wastes no time in taking the initiative to seek out and get the help he knows he needs and that only One could provide.
- *What about us? Do we pursue Jesus or wait for Him to pursue us? Do we seek Him, prepared*

for whatever His response may be and asking only for what we truly need? Or do we fidget and complain about why He doesn't come to us and just do what is best?

III.) PLEADING BEFORE **GOD**

- Though a proud and powerful soldier, this Centurion has no problems pleading in dependence upon Jesus for his help!
- Though a commander of a unit of 100 highly trained soldiers – the best in the world; though a man used to being followed and obeyed; though a man who has shown respect for the God of the Jews by building them a synagogue; though highly esteemed and cow-towed to by the Jewish Elders, the faithful soldier does not demand anything of Christ. *Instead, he pleads in earnest and as an inferior.*

IV.) PROCLAIMING OWN **INADEQUACY**

- Notice from the details in Luke's account, however, the stark difference between the pleading of the Jewish elders and that of the faithful soldier.
- The Jewish elders are intent on *earning* Jesus' help through appealing to the asserted 'worthiness' of the Centurion. A 'worthiness,' by the way, that is defined according to his financial contributions that are consistent with their own personal interests.
- The Centurion, in marked contrast, when he finds out Jesus is on the way to his house, sends out friends to communicate a very different response and expectation.
- The faithful soldier is quick not to hide or pretend, but to admit and emphasize his understanding of his own worthiness – or, more accurately, lack thereof!
- Though he is a patron of (over) the local Jewish Synagogue, he recognizes that when it comes to Jesus he (the Centurion) is now the client and Jesus the patron.
- The Centurion rates himself lower than others esteem him.
- He understands that his worthiness before Jesus has nothing to do with his societal position, status, citizenship, wealth, power or reputation. Nor is it something that can be bought or earned with 'good deeds.' He clearly recognizes and has no shame in confessing that before the Holy One, there is nothing that can make him worthy.
- *What about us? How do we approach Jesus? Expect Him to approach us? By what do we determine our worthiness to receive His presence, reply or blessing?*

V.) PROFESSING JESUS' **AUTHORITY**

- On what basis, then, does the faithful soldier so firmly yet humbly place his trust in Jesus as The Answer?
- Is it because Jesus is popular? Charismatic? Wealthy? Holds a high position in society? Has a reputation as a really nice man?
- **No! It is for one simple fact: the Centurion recognizes that Jesus speaks and acts with the Father's authority – that is, an authority over ALL that exists – including illness and death!**
- Most people, even the unsaved, have little problem professing Jesus' astute teaching, devoted following, interesting stories and parables, or apparent charisma. The stumbling block for so many, however, is earnestly professing His authority over ALL that exists – including and especially themselves!
- *What about us? Putting aside for a moment all else, do we truly profess His authority? Over ALL things? Our circumstances? Our free choice? Our relationships? Our very selves?*

THE **JUDGMENT**

- **Matthew 8:10.**
- This is one of only two occasions in which it is recorded that Jesus ever “*marveled,*” “*wondered,*” “*was amazed.*” The other was in regard to the unbelief of Israel. But, here it is at the faith of a powerful Gentile!
- **Matthew 8:11-12.**
- Again notice the contrasts. “*sons of the kingdom*” is what would have been an unmistakable reference to the Jewish elders, Pharisees and Scribes. They are those who presume automatic citizenship and privilege because of their ancestry – born and raised as Hebrews. Yet, they are in truth un-repentant and refuse Jesus' authority over their own lives.
- In contrast stands this uncircumcised Gentile from an ancestry much different and far removed. Yet, he trusts unquestioningly in Jesus' authority and is credited with “*great faith.*”
- **Jesus' pronouncement is that our spiritual ancestry is determined by our faith, not our name or earthly heritage. So too is our eternal future in the starkest terms and reality!**
- This, in turn, is a faith that will draw and unite all peoples together before God and His eternal blessings!
- **Matthew 8:13.**
- “*Go*” - remain active and moving forward in such faith.
- “*as you have believed, let it be done to you*” - your 'going,' your present and future will be determined by your already established conviction and faith.
- “*and his servant was cured*” - Jesus' power and authority is not limited by space or distance.
- “*that very moment*” - nor constrained by time.

RELECTION: **WILL YOU BE A FAITHFUL SOLDIER?**

Would Jesus consider you a child of implied inheritance or a child of submission?

Do you accept that Jesus died on the cross for your sins precisely because you are and can never – apart from Him – be worthy of His acceptance or blessings?

Are you living in full and faithful submission to His authority in every area of your life, according to His Word?

Will others find themselves healed by Jesus because of your faithful passion, pleading, proclaiming and professing before Jesus?