

Matthew 8 sermon: The faith of the Centurion

Rev. Bruce Stanley

Full text and audio available at www.waitara.anglican.asn.au

- III – Last week, a 48 year old man died trying to rescue his 2 sons from a rip on a South Coast beach. As he tried to rescue his children, the police say he “got into difficulties” and drowned.

It’s a frightening thing when we lose control of a situation. I can identify with this story because I nearly drowned at a beach when I was 10 years old and got caught in a rip. People swam out to rescue me and brought me back safely. But it’s a feeling I’ll always remember. That loss of control, that feeling of helplessness – have you ever felt powerless like that?

A sickness in the family. A problem in a relationship. A medical condition. Something difficult at work. Or maybe a long term issue in your life?

Today, I want to suggest that none of us are in control. None of us can really say “I’m ready for anything.” None of us can really even be prepared for what could happen tomorrow. None of us are ever in complete control because...

- none of us have power or authority over the things in this world.

If we want to be able to face the challenges of life, whatever comes our way, then we really need to hear this story today about the Centurion that Jesus meets.

The Centurion is a person facing a big challenge in his life. He has no power or authority over the problem. But he is able to face the challenge because of the way he comes to Jesus. Whether you’re a follower of Jesus or not, this story of the Centurion will give you 3 challenges to think about:

- 1. Who is the REAL Jesus?
 2. What is our REAL need? and
 3. What is REAL faith?
- 1. Who is the REAL Jesus?
- For many people Jesus is a bit like Santa Claus. He likes the good boys and girls. He has a list of who’s naughty and nice. And he has little elves, called Christians, to help him make the world a happier place. And if he wanted to, he could fly on reindeer... since he could walk on water. Many people picture Jesus as a jolly happy guy who walks around doing good and spreading a little cheer.

But the REAL Jesus, the Jesus we meet in Matthew’s gospel, is no Santa Claus. The REAL Jesus is a person of incredible power and authority. He heals the lame, the blind, the cripple, the demon possessed, the lepers, and he even raises the dead. He calms storms, feeds the hungry, and shows his power and authority over every single thing on earth. *He’s more like Robocop or Gladiator than Santa Claus!*

- The Centurion in the story is also a man with authority. The name “Centurion” doesn’t mean he can hit 100 in a test match. He’s a military leader in authority over 100 soldiers. The Centurion knows what it means to have authority. He can command one man to go and he goes. Another to come and he comes. And he says to Jesus – I know you’re a man with authority. This world is under your power! My servant is sick and in

incredible pain and suffering – but I know you can command the sickness to leave him and it will leave. You don't even need to come to my house – you just say the word and he'll be healed.

III – Could you imagine having a doctor like that? Imagine you're sick – and maybe you are at the moment. So you ring up the doctor and say – "OK doc, I'm sick. Can you just tell the sickness to go away please?" And the doctor says a word and it's gone. No medicine. No waiting. No physical contact. No one has that authority. Except Jesus. You see Jesus isn't just some guy who did some miracles. He had **authority** over the things of this world!

The Centurion doesn't see in Jesus some nice guy who's a good teacher with some magical powers. He sees a King with authority. But he recognises something else. Not only does he know that Jesus has authority and power over all things, but he also recognises that **he doesn't**. He recognises that **he needs Jesus**. He needs Jesus to be able to face the things in life that come his way. Because Jesus is the only one with authority over everything.

You see, it doesn't matter how much authority or power we THINK we have, or how much we THINK we are in control of things. The reality is that Jesus is the only one with **supreme** authority over **all** things. QWhat heshows us throughout Matthew is that **everything** is under his power and authority. Jesus is the only one that holds the authority over **all** of the things ahead of us in life.

- So, Who is the REAL Jesus? He's the only one with authority over all things.
- What is our REAL need? To have Jesus in authority over our life and the things in our life. What does that mean? It means having REAL faith.
- What is REAL faith? REAL faith is when we are prepared to come under Jesus' authority.

The Centurion doesn't just say that he **knows** Jesus has the authority to heal. He also says, by coming to Jesus, "Jesus, I DON'T have control. I DON'T have authority. I can order my soldiers around, but I have no control over this sickness. But you do. I am NOT in control. I have NO authority. I have NO power. But YOU DO!

That's REAL faith. Not just placing our confidence, our trust, our dependence, our belief in Jesus. But also NOT depending on ourselves.

When we read a story like this, I think we obviously want to identify with the good guy – the Centurion. We want to say that we have faith like his.

But we need to hear what Jesus is saying. Verse 10 – Jesus was **amazed** at the Centurion's faith. He knows that this man recognises and trusts His authority over all things. At the time, Jesus is surrounded by his Jewish followers. And He says to them, **to those following him** – Jesus says **to his followers** –

- *"I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith. ¹¹I 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. ¹²But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."*

What is Jesus saying to all the Jews people following him? He's saying "a lot of you guys just 'follow' me, but you don't have real faith and that means you're headed to hell. But there's going to be lots of Gentiles, people who aren't Jews, like this Centurion, who will be going to heaven because they have real faith.

Why does he say this? Because Jesus wants us to know that it doesn't matter if you're a Jew or not. He doesn't care about your family line! Or your religion. Or your religious practices. He cares about your faith!

He doesn't care if you follow along behind him and live a good life and talk about him all the time. What he cares about is if you have real FAITH in him – which means you give him authority in your life.

There are plenty of people who sit in Christian churches today who are headed towards hell. Why? Because they follow Jesus without faith. They imitate Jesus without trust. They say they believe in Jesus but they go on trusting **themselves** with everything in their life.

What part of your life comes under Jesus' authority? Is your marriage under his authority? Are your morals under his authority? Your finances, your work, your time, your future plans? Following Jesus isn't about being from a Christian family. Following Jesus isn't about going to church. Following Jesus isn't about saying the right creeds, or giving money, or how much time you spend praying or reading the Bible. Following Jesus isn't about being religious or spiritual or devout or pious. It's not about **knowing** more or **doing** more.

It's about REAL faith in Jesus. Not in ourselves. It's about recognising Jesus' authority over ALL of our life.

You might be comfortably walking along in life at the moment, ticking all the right boxes, following the right path, DOING all the right things, nothing's out of control, finances are good, relationships are OK. You're getting by **following** the teachings of Jesus. Reading your Bible. Praying. Getting to Church. But are you putting things in your life under Jesus' authority?

- Maybe today this is a reminder for you – bring EVERYTHING in your life to God!

Talk to him about your decisions. Put things under his authority rather than just running your own life. Things might be going well, but that's no reason to stop talking to God about things. **Keep** bringing all the things in your life under his authority.

Or maybe you're intentionally NOT bringing things under Jesus' authority. Maybe you don't WANT to listen to him. Maybe you know the answer from God you might get isn't the answer you want.

- Then maybe today you need to be reminded of who God is.

He's your loving heavenly Father. He's not the Father who abused you as a child. He's not the boss who wants to make life difficult for you. He's not the bully in the playground who wants to see you suffer. And he's not the preacher who wants to take all the joy out of your life. He's your loving heavenly Father who actually wants what's best for you. And who knows what's best for you.

- Are you just following? Or are you faithful?

Is your life under his authority?