

Matthew 8

Verses 5-13

Just Speak the Word

6.08.2006

Some time ago I was watching Pat Rafter play in the US Open on television. John Newcombe was commentating, and as he spoke it was as if Newk was coaching Pat Rafter. He said things like “Forget what’s happened, believe that you’ll win!” and “Keep believing!”

Unfortunately, either Pat did not have a television monitor to hear Newk’s coaching tips, or else Pete Sampras must have believed even more that he could win, because Pat lost.

In many coaching styles, many self-hep techniques, and in many how-to-succeed courses, there is an emphasis on belief. Most often it is stated that you must believe in yourself, if you want to win.

The Bible never says that. The Bible never says to believe in yourself. It is much more careful with its words. Those who do believe in themselves, that they can do something, are often labelled the self-righteous, the ones who think they are okay when they are not.

Instead, the Bible says we should have humility. Anything we do in our own strength is doomed to failure. It may flourish for a while, but it is doomed to fail.

It is not that we should have such a view that we can never do anything, rather, we are to believe in Jesus, and then to be amazed at what he can do, even through us.

In the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7, Jesus declared this again and again, saying the poor in spirit are blessed, the meek are blessed and inherit the earth, and the self-righteous will never enter God’s kingdom. Only as we follow him, and trust him will we be blessed.

And then as he finished that sermon, in Matthew 8:1-4, he met the leper who came and pleaded for help. If ever there was a more rejected, more spat on, more resented person than the leper, it would have to be one of the soldiers in the occupying Roman Army forces. And straight after the leper had been cleansed, a Centurion, a captain of the Roman Army, came up to Jesus

with a request.

“Lord, my servant is lying at home paralysed, in terrible distress.”

He was polite, calling him Lord, which could mean ‘sir’ or ‘lord’. But here was a captain of the hated occupying forces, saying that the Romans could not do everything, and he cared enough about Jesus to politely ask for help. His servant was in great agony and paralysed.

So Jesus said *“I will come and cure him.”* That was odd, for Jesus rarely helped the non-Jews, and usually focused attention on the Jews alone. It is so odd that many Bible commentators suggest that it should be a question... *“Shall I go and cure him?”* suggesting a NO. But for some reason, Jesus says he would help this Gentile.

But the Gentile refused to let Jesus go to his home. He said *“Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; but only speak the word and my servant will be healed. For I also am a man under authority with soldiers under me; and I say to one ‘Go’ and he goes, and another ‘Come,’ and he comes, and to my slave ‘Do this,’ and the slave does it.”*

The man was used to very rigid authority structures. The commands he carried out came from Caesar, even though it may have been from the mouth of a superior officer. The commands he gave were treated as if from Caesar, for he had his authority.

So if Jesus could heal, all he needed to do was just speak the word, and it would be done.

He believed Jesus could do it. He did not need to even see the servant. No razzamatazz, no hoo haa. Just speak the word and it is done.

Jesus *“was amazed and said to those who followed him, ‘Truly I tell you, in no-one in Israel have I found such faith.’”*

The centurion’s faith was directed squarely at Jesus. You can do it! Jesus, you can do it! Just speak the word!

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Newcombe was saying "You can do it! You can do it! Just believe in yourself!" But Pat Rafter could not do it. Was the centurion going to be as disappointed as Newcombe? Is Jesus able to be trusted?

Jesus said "'Go; let it be done for you according to your faith.' and the servant was healed in that hour."

The centurion found that his faith was not disappointing. I have found the same myself. I know Jesus can be trusted.

But there are some people who will be very disappointed, because the things they have trusted will turn out to be very untrustworthy. Just before Jesus told the centurion to go home, as he spoke to the crowd with him, he said this... "*I tell you, many will come from east and west and will eat with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the heirs of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*"

The leper in v1-4 had been treated with great disdain by the Jews, and had suffered greatly before meeting Jesus.

The centurion's servant was suffering greatly and not able to participate in anything except a bed of sorrows and gripes.

The centurion was hated by many Jews, and would have felt the rejection from them.

Yet all three found Jesus accepted them and helped, and restored them to normal functions again.

So it is fitting that Jesus speaks about those who like the leper, the centurion and the servant have come in from the cold. "*many will come from east and west and will eat with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven*"

Some of the Jews following Jesus may have thought that he was referring to the scattered Jews around the world, and how they would be accepted back when God brings in the new

heavens and the new earth that the prophets and Psalms speak about.

But I believe that in the flow of Mt 8, Jesus is referring to rejected Jews and non-Jews, like the leper, the centurion, his servant and us.

We too will feast in the heavenly banquet if we come like the centurion, trusting in Jesus. We will not be disappointed.

However, many who think they are right, like the Pharisees, who trust in themselves as being capable or good enough by what they do and what they have avoided, will find even greater suffering that what the leper, centurion and his servant experienced.

Avoid that. Trust in Jesus and feast with him.