

Matthew 8B

- When Moses spoke to the people of Israel, following the Exodus, he promised them that one day in the future, the Lord would bring Israel another deliverer

Deut. 18:15 “The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your countrymen, you shall listen to him.

- This new Prophet would be raised up from within Israel, Moses says, and He would be far greater than Moses was
 - Because though Moses freed God’s people from slavery in Egypt, this new Prophet would free Israel from slavery to sin
 - And though Moses offered Israel entry into Canaan, the new Prophet would usher Israel into the eternal Kingdom
 - And just as Moses’ ministry was accompanied by great miracles, so would the ministry of this new Moses include miraculous signs
- Matthew recognized that Jesus was the Messiah, that prophet foretold by Moses
 - So as Matthew moves into Chapters 8-9, and begins describing Jesus’ miracles, he draws upon the Exodus story for inspiration
 - In these two chapters, Matthew records ten miracles Jesus performs during the early weeks and months of His ministry in the Galilee
 - We know from other Gospels, that these ten miracles did not happen in the sequence Matthew presents, or even within the same period of time
- Instead, Matthew takes artistic license in compiling these ten incidents so that he could tell a larger story
 - He creates a single narrative that gives us an overview of Jesus’ miracles in the Galilee
 - And more importantly, it draws our attention back to the Exodus story and Jesus’ connection to Moses in Scripture

- But keep in mind, that these ten miracles are not direct parallels to the miracles Moses did
 - We won't find Jesus working with flies or frogs or blood and the like
 - These ten miracles connect Jesus to Moses only in loose ways
 - For example, they are connected simply by the fact that Matthew chose to report ten miracles in this section, just as there were ten plagues
 - Secondly, the first miracle in this discourse, which we studied last time, involved a healing of leprosy
 - Similarly, Moses' start in ministry began with God giving him a miraculous demonstration of healing leprosy

Ex. 4:6 The LORD furthermore said to him, "Now put your hand into your bosom." So he put his hand into his bosom, and when he took it out, behold, his hand was leprous like snow.

Ex. 4:7 Then He said, "Put your hand into your bosom again." So he put his hand into his bosom again, and when he took it out of his bosom, behold, it was restored like the rest of his flesh.

Ex. 4:8 "If they will not believe you or heed the witness of the first sign, they may believe the witness of the last sign.

- Once again, the circumstances are different, but the parallels are evident
 - So Matthew places Jesus' healing of leprosy at the start of this section to emphasize a connection to Moses' ministry
 - And then we also noted last time, that this was a Messianic miracle, proving Jesus was the promised successor to Moses
- Later in this section, Matthew will record Jesus showing command over a stormy Sea of Galilee
 - Obviously, that moment evokes a memory of Moses parting the waters of the Red Sea
 - So in these ways, Matthew implies that Jesus is the greater Moses Who was promised to Israel
- One final note...Matthew divides his account into three sections; and these sections are separated by short scenes relating Jesus' power to His authority

- So the first section opening Chapter 8, consists of miracles over the body
 - That section is followed by a scene demonstrating Jesus' authority over His disciples
 - Then, we have a second section of miracles over the Creation itself
 - And that's followed by a scene depicting Jesus' authority over His enemies
 - Finally, we end with miracles concerning the spiritual realm
- So by the end of Chapter 9, Matthew will show Jesus having power and authority over all things, whether on earth or in Heaven
 - He has command over both the body and soul
 - He has authority over His followers and over His enemies
 - And He rules over this world and the next
- With that, let's look at Jesus' second healing miracle

Matt. 8:5 And when Jesus entered Capernaum, a centurion came to Him, imploring Him,

Matt. 8:6 and saying, "Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, fearfully tormented."

Matt. 8:7 Jesus said to him, "I will come and heal him."

- Jesus second miracle takes place in His home base in the Galilee, in a small fishing village on the NW side of the Sea of Galilee
 - This is the hometown for Peter and Andrew, and earlier, we learned Jesus had moved here with His mother and brothers from Nazareth
 - As He returns from the hillside and enters the town, Jesus encounters a request from a Roman centurion
 - A centurion was an officer in the Roman army, responsible for a hundred men, so he's a man of some importance
 - More importantly, the centurion is not Jewish, obviously

- So we should ask why is a Roman centurion coming to a Jewish rabbi for help?
- Normally when Romans needed supernatural assistance, they appealed to their gods in pagan temples, not to Jewish rabbis
- Moreover, Jews and Romans were enemies, and had nothing to do with one another, except when absolutely required
- So why did the Roman think that Jesus might be inclined to help him?
- In fact, in Luke's Gospel, we learn that the centurion didn't even presume to come to Jesus personally with this request
 - Instead, Luke reports that the centurion sent a group of Jewish elders of the city to represent his interests before Jesus
 - They testified to Jesus of the centurion's good works on behalf of the city's Jews and their local synagogue
 - The Roman likely assumed Jesus wouldn't entertain a Roman's request for help otherwise
- So what was the centurion thinking?
 - First notice, he calls Jesus "Lord", not rabbi
 - The term means, "master" or "one of authority"
 - So the centurion is acknowledging that Jesus is more than a teacher
 - His words suggest that he knows Jesus possesses real authority
 - Secondly, the Roman is seeking help for a sick servant
 - That's notable, because in Roman culture, servants (or literally the word means a "young slave") were expendable
 - They were commodities that could be easily replaced, and so a sick slave was not reason for great concern
 - Certainly, a Roman officer would not go to this effort to seek care for his servant, especially from a Jew
 - Finally, the servant's sickness is described as a fever that paralyzes and torments the slave terribly

- The centurion knew Jesus wasn't a doctor, yet he expects Jesus to heal the man
 - And the description of the ailment, using the word "torment", strongly suggests his affliction may have been the result of demonic possession
 - If so, then the centurion's choice to seek after Jesus suggests he recognized that Jesus had authority over both the body and the spirit
- So what conclusion would we draw about this man, given those details?
 - First, he sees Jesus as a spiritual authority
 - Secondly, he has a history of showing regard for God's people, even though in earthly terms, Israel was Rome's enemy
 - Thirdly, he demonstrates uncommon love and concern for the weak and vulnerable under his care
 - And finally, he believes Jesus has power over the body and over the spirit
- The only logical conclusion is, this Roman has been touched by the Spirit of God and come to believe in not only the God of Israel but also His Messiah, Jesus
 - Simply put, the Roman centurion is a believer and his actions are a reflection of his heart of faith
 - And Jesus' response to him in v.7 gives us added evidence
 - Notice, Jesus immediately says He will come to heal the man's servant, which suggests Jesus sees this man as one of His
 - So here, we find the first Gentile in Matthew's Gospel to show faith in the Messiah
 - Remember, the themes of Matthew's Gospel are that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Davidic covenant and Abrahamic covenant
 - Matthew already showed Jesus healing a Jew with leprosy for the first time, which is evidence that Jesus fulfills the Davidic covenant
 - And now, we see a Gentile being included in the Kingdom

- Which is a fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise that his seed, the Messiah, would bless all nations, both Jew and Gentile
- Even more remarkably, God has chosen a Gentile whose role in Roman society must have greatly constrained his ability to live-out his faith
 - A centurion was charged with guarding Roman interests in Judea, usually at the expense of the Jews
 - And as an officer in the Roman army, he would have been expected to worship the emperor and Roman pagan gods
 - So as this man embraced Jehovah, he would have immediately been conflicted over following his heart or obeying his culture
 - Yet somehow, he didn't let his position in Roman society prevent him from keeping the two greatest commandments
 - He's showing love for God and for his fellow man
 - But that doesn't mean it was easy or came without cost
 - I wonder if he paid a price for his support to the local Jewish synagogue or if his kindness to them raised suspicions among his superiors?
 - Or when he sought the help of a Jewish rabbi for a servant, did the men under his command think he had gone soft?
 - And when his duties required he pay homage to Roman gods in the local pagan temple, did he struggle with his conscience?
 - Obviously, we won't find answers to these questions in the text, but I think it's safe to assume this man faced such challenges
 - Yet, it's equally evident he found a way to deal with them
 - Perhaps he explained his desire to fund the local synagogue to his superiors as a way of maintaining Jewish support in the town
 - Perhaps he defended his regard for servants as proof he was a commander who looked out for those under his charge
 - Perhaps he made appearances in the Roman temple when required, but silently prayed to the God of Israel rather than to idols

- Whatever he did, he's a great example that devotion to Christ won't be easy, but it doesn't mean we have to retreat from participating in our world
 - On the contrary, our involvement in this world is how we bring light into darkness
 - Sometimes, we can work the two worlds together easily
 - But many times, we will have to make measured choices that carry some risk
- Just do your best to stay engaged in the world, while remaining faithful to your witness
 - But don't be afraid to take risks at times...like this man must have done...as he did when he came to Jesus publicly
 - Because often, that's when you'll see God work the biggest miracles
- So Jesus agrees to go, and according to Luke's Gospel, Jesus begins to follow the Jewish elders toward the centurion's house
 - But when the centurion hears that Jesus is coming, he quickly dispatches a second group of friends to meet Jesus along the way to give Him a message

Matt. 8:8 But the centurion said, "Lord, I am not worthy for You to come under my roof, but just say the word, and my servant will be healed.

Matt. 8:9 "For I also am a man under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to this one, 'Go!' and he goes, and to another, 'Come!' and he comes, and to my slave, 'Do this!' and he does it."

Matt. 8:10 Now when Jesus heard this, He marveled and said to those who were following, "Truly I say to you, I have not found such great faith with anyone in Israel.

Matt. 8:11 "I say to you that many will come from east and west, and recline at the table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven;

Matt. 8:12 but the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Matt. 8:13 And Jesus said to the centurion, "Go; it shall be done for you as you have believed." And the servant was healed that very moment.

- The centurion tells Jesus it's not necessary that Jesus physically come to the centurion's house
 - He said he was not even worthy or deserving to have the Messiah enter into his home
 - And the centurion probably meant this in two ways
 - First, he no doubt would have known that Jews could not enter a Gentile home out of concern for becoming ritually unclean
 - Knowing this, the centurion didn't want to defile Jesus or become cause for Jesus to be dishonored
 - Secondly, the centurion had obvious reverence for Jesus, and having God's anointed in his home was simply too great an honor
 - And while that was true, Jesus was still willing to go
 - Because by the grace of God, the Messiah came to redeem sinners like this man, but the centurion didn't understand that
 - So he insisted that Jesus not lower Himself by entering the centurion's home
 - Instead, the Roman declares that he knows Jesus has the ability to heal from a distance merely by His Word
 - Now, Jesus never claimed to have this ability, and up to this point, Jesus has never done such a thing
 - So this man has made a remarkable assumption about Jesus' power to heal
 - Keep in mind that the centurion had to send a second delegation to intercept Jesus and tell Him not to bother coming
 - Which tells us the centurion never expected Jesus would come to his house in the first place
 - Which is why he quickly dispatched a second group of messengers to stop Jesus when he learned Jesus was coming
 - His faith was so great, he assumed from the beginning that Jesus could heal by His Word

- Interestingly, that first delegation of Jewish elders that the centurion sent to Jesus never thought to suggest that Jesus could just heal by His Word
 - They were ready to escort Jesus back to the centurion's house
 - It never occurred to those Jewish elders to tell Jesus, "You don't need to travel", because they didn't have such faith
 - That tells you how truly special this centurion's response was
- The man's assumption is so remarkable, in fact, that he felt compelled to explain his rationale to Jesus upfront
 - He says through his messengers that he understood how authority worked
 - Being a man in command, he knew that a word was all that was required to get results
 - When he issued a command, results followed, just as his word declared, because that's the mark of authority
 - There's an obvious leadership principle evident at work here, of course, and certainly that's part of the man's thinking
 - The desires of one in authority will be carried out by those who are under his or her authority
 - But the man is testifying to a lot more than merely good leadership principles
 - He's saying something very special about Jesus
- First, ask yourself: over what did the centurion believe Jesus had authority? That is, how did he expect Jesus' Word to result in the slave's healing?
 - In the case of a centurion's authority, it's easy to appreciate how his word would lead to action
 - A soldier under his command would hear the commander's instructions, decide to obey, and then do what was ordered
 - But by what mechanism did the centurion assume Jesus would exercise His authority?
 - So who listened when Jesus spoke? Who would carry out His instructions? The slave? The demons? The human body itself?

- And that question is especially important, considering the centurion was expecting Jesus' Word to operate from miles away
- These questions lead us to our second and more profound conclusion
 - Somehow, this man concluded that Jesus' Word had inherent power and authority
 - That as Jesus spoke, His Words would accomplish things merely by their very existence
- How did he arrive at this conclusion?
 - I imagine that somewhere along the way, the centurion must have been taught by his Jewish friends from the Scriptures
 - He must have learned that all things in the Universe were brought into existence by the Word of God
- As in Genesis 1 where the Lord said, "Let there be light", and it was so
 - That by the authority of His Word, God brought the Creation itself into existence
 - And that the same Creator Who brought everything into existence by His Word, could also direct the course of that Creation by His Word
- So by logical deduction, this centurion concluded that Jesus' Word was the Word of the Creator
 - That merely by speaking His Word, Jesus could make things happen
 - His Word could expel demons, His Word could heal the body, His Word could restore a slave to health
 - And since Jesus' Words were power in themselves, it didn't depend on anyone or anything hearing Jesus or acting for Him
 - Rather, the Word of God possesses inherent power over Creation
 - God's Word immediately and completely accomplishes all that it declares, merely on the basis of its existence
 - The Word of God itself makes this claim

**Is. 55:11 So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth;
It will not return to Me empty,**

Without accomplishing what I desire,
And without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.

- Notice that Isaiah says the Word of God has inherent power to accomplish whatever God has declared
 - The Word of God isn't a set of instructions waiting to be put into action by some other agent or power
 - It *is* an agent of action...it *is* power
- Notice in v.13, that as Jesus witnesses this man's faith, He responds by saying it will be done as you have believed
 - Jesus doesn't say *because* you have believed, but *as* you have believed
 - In other words, what the man was saying about the power of God's Word was true
 - So as the centurion believed the Word of God to be, so will it now be shown to be, Jesus is saying
 - And instantly, Matthew says, the slave was healed back at the centurion's house
 - I love to imagine how this occurred from the perspective of the centurion himself
 - Remember, Jesus and the centurion never meet
 - The centurion remains in his home, probably waiting by the side of his servant
 - And then suddenly the servant is healed before his eyes, based on a Word spoken by Jesus miles away
 - I ask you: was the centurion surprised?
 - Perhaps he was startled by the moment, but I don't think he was surprised by the outcome
 - He knew Jesus was willing, because Jesus was already on His way
 - The centurion was simply waiting for the Word of God to accomplish what God desired

- He knew it could happen, and so he was just waiting on God's timing
- This example is why this church and every Bible-believing Christian should care so much about the Word of God
 - We recognize that in this book, we will find not only truth that guides our thinking, but also power to see it come to pass
 - As the Word of God is read, declared, studied and understood, lives will be changed in miraculous ways
 - The Word of God has power to strengthen relationships, break habits, heal hurts, bring repentance, and save souls
 - These things come to pass in God's timing, according to His will, but the power to bring them about is found in the Word of God
 - But that power is altogether different than what can be accomplished by the words of men
 - And to understand what I mean, consider a simple example
 - How should we help men become better husbands to their wives?
 - An accomplished counselor could teach a seminar for a group of men, explaining how they should treat their wives better
 - He could speak eloquently, provide principles and examples, and give a long list of reasons why his advice is correct
 - The men could nod their heads in agreement and commit to applying what they learned
 - But regardless, the man's words had no power by themselves to bring about any positive change
 - They might be true and sensible, and they make the men feel better about marriage
 - And some men might even benefit from what they learned
 - But good advice and psychology only find their power for change in the will of the individual who receives that advice
 - And how much trust do you place in your own will to accomplish anything good and lasting inside yourself?

- But when we turn to the Word of God and read:

[Eph. 5:25](#) Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her,

[Eph. 5:28](#) So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself;

- Those words might sound very similar to the ones spoken by our marriage counselor or friend
 - But the difference is, the Word of God comes with power
 - The Lord has given every believer in the Church His Spirit to guide us into holiness, into Christ-like thinking and living
 - He's like a spiritual engine inside us, working out the changes we need to make in our lives and empowering us to make them
 - In time, husbands experience conviction, hearts are softened, behaviors change, healing begins, Godliness takes hold
- But like all engines, the Spirit needs fuel to operate
 - And the fuel for that engine, the Bible says, is the Word of God
 - So how much spiritual change you experience in your life will depend, in part, on how much fuel you consume
- But you won't fully realize the power of the Word of God, unless you understand it the way this centurion did
 - You have to recognize that the Word of God has *inherent* power that nothing else can equal
 - Knowing this, you devote yourself to pursuing a life-long relationship with God through His Word
- And don't mistake an intellectual pursuit of information for a relationship
 - We're talking about being like this centurion
 - Seeking out the will of God as expressed by His Word, confident that what God has declared, He will accomplish

- And then living our lives by the light of that revelation
- This centurion apparently understood the deep theological truths that Jesus was God in the flesh, and that His Word had inherent power over Creation
 - And this was such astounding insight and faith, that it impressed even Jesus
 - When Jesus heard this man, Jesus genuinely marveled at his faith
 - This is one of those moments in the Gospels when you can see how the deity of Jesus was limited by His human form
 - Because Jesus isn't pretending or lying
 - He truly didn't expect to hear this response from this man
 - And we know that because Jesus had already begun to walk toward the man's house
 - Jesus says his faith was unequalled in all Israel
 - That's both condemnation and praise in one statement
 - First, Jesus is condemning the Jewish leaders – and Jewish society in general – for not having the same appreciation
 - Consider that this is a Gentile centurion, yet he demonstrates a remarkable insight into Jewish theology about God
 - So he must have spent time in personal study of the Torah
 - And that study awoke him to the truth of God and of a Messiah, and that recognition resulted in his obtaining eternal life
 - Secondly, his study softened his heart toward God's people, leading him to be generous and kind to the Jews of the city
 - Thirdly, it gave him love and compassion for those under his charge, even for the least within his household
 - Finally, it gave him a confident faith in God's Word, believing it could accomplish anything in God's will
 - That's a cycle, or pattern, we should all follow and it begins and ends with God's Word

- First, studying the Word brings us to God, then it changes us to be more like God, and ultimately it makes us dependent on His Word
 - Then, as our dependence on God's Word grows, so does our desire for God and for God's people
 - And as our love grows, so does our reverence for the power and authority of God's Word
- So why didn't the Jewish people see the same things?
 - Jesus gives us the answer elsewhere in the Gospels

Mark 12:24 Jesus said to them, "Is this not the reason you are mistaken, that you do not understand the Scriptures or the power of God?"

- He says it's because they didn't examine the Scripture with honest intentions, nor with an appreciation for its power
- Back in Matthew 8:11-12, Jesus says this centurion's trust in God's Word is an example of the many Gentiles who will be in the Kingdom
 - That there will be many from east and west who will sit with the Jewish patriarchs at the banquet table in the Kingdom
 - After Jesus' Second Coming, a feast will inaugurate His 1,000-year Kingdom period on earth, the Bible says
 - That feast will be the fulfillment of the Feast of Tabernacles, and Jesus says it will be attended by all saints
 - Obviously, the patriarchs will be in attendance, probably seated near the head of some unbelievably huge table or tables
 - But Jesus also says that people from east and west will be there too, referring to Gentile nations from across the world
 - You and I will be seated there...and that day is not that long away...it will be here before you know it
 - But there will be some people missing from that moment, Jesus says, people who were expecting to be there, seated in the choice seats
 - Jesus calls these missing people the "sons of the Kingdom", which was a term that the Pharisees often used to describe themselves

- Pharisees expected God to reward them for their self-righteous, ritualistic piety
- But Jesus says that nonsense won't get them a ticket to the banquet... only faith in the power of Jesus' Word gets us a seat at that table
 - Instead, they would be in a place of weeping and gnashing of teeth and outer darkness
 - Those are Matthew's favorite terms for the Lake of Fire, the final eternal abode for all unsaved souls
 - In Greek, the text says "the" weeping and "the" gnashing, meaning intense sorrow and intense anger at what they will experience
- The Bible is filled with ironies like this...
 - So-called wise men, who were really fools when it came to God, while the supposedly lost and forgotten were those remembered by God
 - What determines who will be who? What you believe about Jesus and His Word...faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of Christ