

“By the Authority Vested In Me”

Matthew 8:5-13
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Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain was born in Brewer, Maine on September 8th, 1828. He served as a professor of rhetoric at Bowdoin College and was fluent in nine foreign languages. At the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861, Chamberlain enlisted with the 20th Maine regiment as lieutenant colonel.

Chamberlain is best known for his valiant defense of Little Round Top at the Battle of Gettysburg. Sent to defend the southern slope of Little Round Top, Chamberlain found himself and the 20th Maine at the far left end of the Union line, with the other infantry regiments to their right. He quickly understood the significance of Little Round Top and the need for the 20th Maine to hold the Union left line at all costs. The men from Maine waited while troops from the 15th Alabama regiment charged up the hill, attempting to flank the Union position. Time and time again the Confederates struck, until the 20th Maine was almost doubled back upon itself. With many casualties and ammunition running low, Col. Chamberlain recognized the dire circumstances and gave the word to his left wing to swing down like a door.

The 20th Maine charged down the hill, using an unusual tactical maneuver of having the extreme left wing wheel continually to make the charging line swing like a hinge thus creating a simultaneous frontal assault and flanking maneuver, capturing many of the Confederate soldiers and successfully saving the flank.

Chamberlain was a man vested with authority by the Union commanders. The soldiers underneath him faithfully followed his every word. When he made the command to flank the Confederate army, the men had faith in his command and obeyed without hesitation ... even though the odds were stacked against them. From his report of the day: "At that crisis, I ordered the bayonet. The word was enough." The soldiers had faith in the Word of their commander.

In our Gospel text for today, we heard of a similar character to Chamberlain, a centurion. This centurion, a Gentile, was the leader of 100 Roman soldiers. He is a man given authority by caesar. The men under him faithfully follow his Word. *Yet*, he recognizes and confesses that Christ has the authority of God over creation to heal his paralyzed servant by speaking *His* Word. The Centurion's

GREAT FAITH BELIEVES THE GREATER WORD.

(I. The centurion's great faith believed that Christ's Word was authoritative. (vv. 5-9))

(II. The centurion's great faith is an example of people from all nations believing Christ's Word.

(vv. 10-12))

(III. The centurion's great faith was answered by the power of Christ's Word. (v. 13))

I.

We hear again from the Gospel:

5 When he entered Capernaum, a centurion came forward to him, appealing to him, 6 "Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, suffering terribly." 7 And he said to him, "I will come and heal him." 8 But the centurion replied, "Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof, but only say the word, and my servant will be healed. 9 For I too am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. And I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes, and to another, 'Come,' and he comes, and to my servant,[c] 'Do this,' and he does it."

Chamberlain's regiment faithfully obeyed his word, flanking the Confederate line in the face of all odds... charging with the bayonet. In the same way, the centurion can say "Go!" and his

soldier goes or “Do this!” and his soldier does it. The Centurion believes that Christ's Word had the same dominion over the illness of his servant. The centurion believes that Christ’s Word had instant effect. He says, "Lord, I am not worthy for you to come under my roof, but just say the word, and my servant will be healed." The centurion testifies that Christ is Lord, the Lord of Creation. He faithfully sees Christ as having God's authority over the physical realm. He confesses that by a word, Christ has authority to restore this creation.

God’s Word carries authority. God spoke His Word into the nothingness and made creation. He spoke the Word of promise that he would send a Seed who would crush the serpent’s head. His Word repeated this promise to the patriarchs... who faithfully believed. Christ, God incarnate, spoke His Word to blind, deaf, sick, and dead people. By the authority of this Word, men regained their sight, their hearing, their health, and their life. When Christ said the temple would be destroyed and on the third day, be raised up... By the authority of His Word, it was so.

II.

The continuation of the Gospel:

10 When Jesus heard this, he marveled and said to those who followed him, "Truly, I tell you, with no one in Israel have I found such faith. 11I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, 12 while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

You will recall the visit of Rev. Daniel Preus to this congregation in October. During his Bible Class, he told a compelling story, contrasting the churches of Scandinavia with the churches of Africa. If you recall, the Scandinavian churches operate much the same as those of the “sons of the kingdom” in our text. They no longer grasp the promise of the Savior. They put their faith in moralism and in the works of the law. They throw off the inerrancy of the Word of God as a

irrational belief. The rebel against God's Will and deny the order of creation by supporting homosexual marriage and requiring support of women's ordination by all pastors. At one time these countries had thriving Lutheran churches. Now 95% of the population are "*members*" and 2% of the population demonstrate their faith by worshipping regularly.

The sons of the kingdom are effectively in a state church. They assume their natural birth brings spiritual sonship even without faith in promise of the Messiah. Their faith is a faith of name only, "sons of the kingdom." They rely on their deeds to save them. They believed in the institution... not the institutor. They do not have faith in the Word.

What will happen to those who do not have faith? Christ tells us that the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. In Christ we were all made heirs and sons to his kingdom. Yet there are many who will deny God's election of them. They will resist His Word of promise and hope. They will neglect His Word and His true presence in the sacraments. For these, the sons of the kingdom will be cast outside the brilliance of the banquet hall... into the outer darkness. In this darkness there is no light. Christ's radiant image at His feast is hidden from them. Here, in the absence of light is the absence of God. This is eternal suffering... not the temporal suffering of the paralyzed servant. In this darkness, no centurion can come and intercede for you. This is the picture of the end, the final judgment.

Rev. Preus contrasted this deplorable situation in Scandinavia with the joys of churches of Africa. There Christianity is thriving and growing. His most remarkable example was the Lutheran church in the Sudan. Even in the midst of a civil war which killed millions of people, the

church grew from one bishop to a church of over 10,000. The Gospel is working faith in all nations, whether Jew, Gentile, American, or African.

10. When Jesus heard this, he marveled...

Why did Christ marvel when he heard the confession by the centurion? Jesus hears a confession from a *Gentile*! So far in his ministry he has not heard such profession for the Gentiles! God expects good things of all his children. Just as with the Canaanite woman of Matthew 15, God extends the blessings of his Word to all nations. They testify to this blessing with their confession of faith. This amazement and marveling of Jesus is just as earthly fathers marvel at their own children. Its not that they don't expect their children to do such things. Yet at that moment, they marvel that the child has done what was expected. He exclaims "Truly I say to you, with no one in Israel have I found such great faith!" He marvels before those who followed him. In much the same way, an earthly father praises the child before others. He is pleased to see faith in His Word.

11 I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven,

When do we and all believers of all nations recline with the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob at the holy banquet? We recline at table and partake of this feast at the altar when we receive Christ's Body and Blood. All nations, dispersed by the sin of Adam, come from the East and the West... return to Christ... return to the Church... return to the new Jerusalem to join in the foretaste of the feast to come. At the resurrection of the dead, all the redeemed will join with the fathers of Israel at the great heavenly banquet.

III.

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

The miracle is not the centurion's authority over others. The miracle is not his faithful confession. The miracle is that God's Word heals. The **great faith** of the centurion testifies to this truth. The **greater Word** heals without being uttered even in the presence of the paralyzed servant. The greatest miracle of all is that the same healing of God's Word continues today.

Through His Son Jesus, God exercised his authority over creation. Not only did he heal the paralyzed servant but He transformed the condemnation the world brings. He healed us from sin. His Word came to us as His son, true God and true man, born of a virgin. His Son came to swallow up the death we deserve and give us the life he promised. God is not the animator of creation... creating the world, winding it up like a toy, and setting it off on its own. God is the creator, intimately involved in His creation. He provided for his servants Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He provided for all man by his coming as flesh, dying on the cross, and rising again that we may live. This miracle brought healing to the centurion's servant. Through his Son, true man, all men were healed to him.

"Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."¹ The prophets of old had testified faith in God's Word. By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household. By faith Abraham went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. By faith Sarah herself received power to con-

¹ Hebrews 11:1, followed by paraphrase of 11:3-32.

ceive, even when she was past the age. By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, even though God had said, "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named." He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead. By faith Israel kept the Passover and sprinkled the blood, so that the Destroyer of the firstborn might not touch them. By faith the people crossed the Red Sea as if on dry land, but the Egyptians, when they attempted to do the same, were drowned. By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days.

By faith in His Word, God gives us His good gifts, preserves us, and delivers us. We confess our faith in the prayer he taught us saying "thy will be done", "Give us this day our daily bread", and "deliver us from evil." We are not making demands of God. We are asking God for the gifts he has promised his children. We believe and we confess that God does give all good gifts, that his Will be done, and that he will deliver us from the world, our flesh, and the Evil One.

We pray for those who are hurting, who are sick, who are dying, who are poor, needy, or hungry. We don't limit these prayers to the faithful. Just as Christ came for all nations, we pray for all people of all nations. We know that God has elected all to be saved by the death of his son. We pray that all nations would be brought to saving faith. We pray that they would be moved by the Spirit to a faith that apprehends the Word of God, trusts in it, and believes it has the authority over our sinful flesh. Recognizing the gift of His Son, we pray that all would recognize the many gifts of God whether it be healing, food, clothing, house, or good weather.

Our prayer for the unbeliever is a fruit of our faith. It is motivated by the Holy Spirit through the hearing of His Word. The Spirit uses us to confess the truth of the Word before others. The Gospel is not entitlement for an elite elect. The Gospel is for all. It is for all minority groups, tax brackets, and social castes. There is no limit to this Gospel. When Christ speaks the Word, it is

so. Great faith believes the greater Word. It has authority over all creation. It has the power to create faith. By His Word we are saved.

We pray that his Word may be spoken by his Spirit in us so that all people of all nations may receive the same faith which we have been given.