

MAN'S EXTREMITY IS GOD'S OPPORTUNITY (Mt. 8:5-13)

We are looking at a situation involving the most unlikely of characters, who approached Jesus on behalf of one for whom he was concerned. The man was a Roman centurion. No doubt, he was a loyal and well-decorated soldier who belonged to the most powerful army in the world. At first glance, being a Gentile qualified him to be despised by the Jews.

He was, of course, a man of great authority ... the commanding officer of one hundred men. His word was to be unquestionably obeyed. His job would have toughened him, and yet, there was an issue he was compelled to bring to Jesus, - one of his servants was suffering.

Now, what kind of a servant was this? Let's allow the text to explain ... The centurion said to Jesus, **Mt. 8:6** Lord *Κύριος* ... That is the title he would have used to address Caesar, so obviously he had a great respect for Jesus! ... Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented. The word he used for 'servant' wasn't δούλος or διάκονος, but the word **παῖς**, - from which we get 'paediatric', - and **παῖς** refers to a young boy. ... The heart of this tough professional military man was 'laid open' before the Saviour.

And Jesus observed the kindness of this centurion, so He replied, ⁷ I will come and heal *ἰθεραπεύω* him. ... In fact, Jesus answered the centurion's request even without the centurion making it for the centurion had not made a request of any kind to Jesus. He had simply stated a fact his young servant boy was lying at home gravely ill! ... And when Jesus astounded the centurion and told him what He was going to do, ⁸ The centurion answered and said, Lord *Κύριος*, I am not worthy *[compared to You, I'm not good enough]* that thou shouldst come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my *[how personal!]* servant *[child, παῖς]* shall be healed *[made whole]*. ... *What a faith this unbeliever had!*

Jesus was impressed for He and everyone knew the authority this man had, as the centurion himself explained, ⁹ I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant *ἰδούλος*, Do this, and he doeth it.

Luke gives an account of this same miracle, **Lk. 7:2** And a certain centurion's servant *[δούλος]*, who was dear *[ἔντιμος, precious]* unto him, was sick *[κακῶς]*, and ready to die. ³ And when he heard of Jesus, he sent unto him the elders of the Jews, beseeching him *[Jesus]* that he would come and heal his servant *[δούλος]* ... ⁷ Wherefore neither thought I myself worthy to come unto thee: but *say in a word [how impressive!]*, and my servant *[παῖς, 'child']* shall be healed *[ἰάομαι, be made whole]*. ⁸ For I also am a man set under

authority, having under me soldiers, and I say unto one, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant [δοῦλος], Do this, and he doeth it. ...
10 And they that were sent, returning to the house, found the servant [δοῦλος] whole that had been sick.

This was a child-slave ... a young boy who was the *property* of the centurion. We are not told whether the child's mother and father were slaves in the same household, or maybe the centurion had gone out and bought the child reckoning he would have many years of service out of him. Whatever the case, this young boy was a slave, and miserable with the pain he was enduring.

Here is a real Gospel Good News story! ... Who would have imagined a Roman centurion to have a heart such as this soldier?! Who would have thought the Jewish leaders would have supported a Roman soldier and approached Jesus on his behalf to have his young boy healed! And yet, God had already prophesied in the Old Testament concerning such things, I will gather all nations and tongues; and they shall come, and see my glory (Is. 66:18). ... And again, prior to the birth of the Saviour, **Lk 2:32** A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.

This is a real miracle story! ... Everything was against the young boy until Jesus drew near. ... If you want a title for our study, let's call it, "*Man's extremity is God's opportunity*", for here we have a battle-hardened soldier who was **greatly troubled** ... not over a conflict on the battlefield, but over the care of a slave.

God's grace was truly at work. When you visit Capernaum today, the Jewish tour guide will direct you into the ruins of the ancient synagogue, and there you will sit and he will tell you how the synagogue was built upon a previous synagogue with the money donated by a Roman centurion. If that is true, it aligns with this Biblical account for it seems the Jewish leaders had respect for this Gentile because they went at the centurion's request to find Jesus (Lk. 7:3). ... And it is *not* improbable the centurion had converted to become a Jew since he went to the synagogue and sought the help of the religious leaders who went and found Jesus. ... Isn't it also amazing he did not seek a rabbi, but he went looking for Jesus! ... It was a big enough miracle for Jews and a Gentile Roman centurion to be working together but it was an even *bigger* miracle they considered Jesus to be the answer to their problem! ... We should never underestimate the power of God working in impossible circumstances!

When God is working, *nothing* can hold Him back ... and He was working with this Roman centurion who was **greatly troubled**.

As for the young child, he was **greatly tormented**. The word used to describe his pain is the same word used for the ‘torment’ (βασανίζω) of the rich man in Hell (Lk. 16:23) ... That indicates how this young boy was suffering!

The centurion was **greatly troubled**, the child was **greatly tormented** ... and then we see the **great tenderness** for into Capernaum Jesus came to bring peace to a soldier who was a man of war, and to a young child in great affliction. ... Indeed, that is one of His Old Testament titles, ^{Is. 9:6} his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, *The Prince of Peace*.

He knew all about the Roman centurion and the young boy, He had them both already on His heart, and He would bring them both *peace*. ... God’s grace was at work for there was no other way this centurion would have known to call Jesus ‘Lord’, - his words to Jesus were Holy Spirit inspired for no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost (I Cor. 12:3). ... The Roman centurion was testifying and declaring his belief in front of those people to the Lordship of Christ, and that Jesus could heal the young boy.

And, at the centurion’s request, Jesus didn’t enter his home, his military barracks. ... Instead, He simply spoke the word, and the boy was miraculously and wonderfully healed. I wonder what the *word* was, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof: but speak *the word only*, and my servant shall be healed (v.8). ... Whatever it was, it came with the authority of Heaven. One moment the young boy had been in pain, facing uncertainty ... and the next, he was in full health and strength. ... *A miracle of God’s grace!*

In front of the Jewish leaders and the people of Capernaum, Jesus said, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel (v.10). ... From the human side of Jesus, He was amazed how this Roman Gentile centurion showed more confidence and trust in Him than He had found from anyone anywhere in Israel.

And then the Lord Jesus took the opportunity to address His disciples concerning His coming Kingdom, ¹¹ And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west *[Jew and Gentile]*, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. ¹² But the children of the *[earthly]* kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. ... There are only two ‘kingdoms’, - the Kingdom of God, and the kingdom of Satan, in opposition ... and every person is in either one or the other. We are born with hostility towards to God because of our sin, but by His grace, through the blood

of Christ shed on the cross for our redemption, we become members of His Kingdom. ... We either belong to the Kingdom of God or the kingdom of Satan ... and when Jesus returns at His second coming, all His redeemed and saved children will come from every corner of the world, - from every nation, Jew and Gentile, - and will sit down together in His Kingdom ... while those who refused to receive Him will be cast out into outer darkness ... which is Hell, for all eternity, where there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Then, after He had used this opportunity for the Gospel, Jesus turned and said to the centurion ... - imagine a carpenter *commanding* a centurion ... and He said to the centurion, ¹³Go thy way; and as thou hast *believed*, so be it done unto thee. *Did* the centurion truly believe? Yes, he *truly* believed in Jesus, and the proof he truly believed was evidenced in the outcome, his servant was healed in the selfsame hour. ... And since the centurion had great faith *before* the servant was healed, - so as to contact Jesus, - what must his faith have been *afterwards*?! What must it have been like when he saw the young boy getting up from the bed in perfect health and strength ... with no pain or distress!

In the words of the psalmist, ^{Ps. 136:1}O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good. ... God is good to each of us, and He is also good to us as a church fellowship. He has our future in His hands for He is faithful. If it were not for His abundant goodness, we would not be here. ... He is with us beside the still waters, and He is with us through the valley. He will never leave, abandon or forsake us. And during the uncertain and difficult times we often find ourselves in, He brings us to realise that "*our extremity is His opportunity*".

My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness;
I dare not trust the sweetest frame
But wholly lean on Jesus' name.
On Christ the solid rock I stand
All other ground is sinking sand.