**Jesus According to *Centurio***

**(Matthew 8:5-13)**

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When Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him, asking for help. “Lord,” he said, “my servant lies at home paralyzed, suffering terribly.” Jesus said to him, “Shall I come and heal him?” The centurion replied, “Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, ‘Go,’ and he goes; and that one, ‘Come,’ and he comes. I say to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and he does it.” When Jesus heard this, he was amazed and said to those following him, “Truly I tell you, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith. I 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. But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” Then Jesus said to the centurion, “Go! Let it be done just as you believed it would.” And his servant was healed at that moment. (Matthew 8:5-13)



There are many paintings of Jesus depicts him as a man of white Anglo-Saxon descent, when the reality is that he would have looked more like a Palestinian as he was born to people of that region. These paintings however have shaped the perception that Christianity is a white-man’s religion everywhere in the world. This myth has distorted of the world’s view of Christ Jesus.

As we start on this new sermon series “Jesus according to…” it is a timely reminder to focus back on who Jesus is, and who He is to each one of us. One’s eternity depends on how one answers the question.

The Gospel of Matthew was written between AD 50 - AD 70. This gospel was written to cater to Jewish readership. Matthew 5 is interesting because it is about Jesus providing healing to the marginalized groups in and around Jewish society, particularly the “unclean” (Healing of the leper by touch, Matthew 8: 1-4), the Gentile and enemy of the state (Faith of the Centurion for his servant, Matthew 8: 5-13), and women (healing of Peter’s mother- in-law, Matthew 8: 14-15).



**BIG IDEA:**

**Jesus has an “open door” policy.**

Let us explore who Jesus is from the eyes of a Roman centurion.

# Jesus refuses the prejudices of His day

When Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him, asking for help. (Matthew 5: 5)

To be a centurion would have meant that one spent many years as a soldier in the Roman army, and taking part in raid campaigns and conquering of Jewish lands, before being entrusted to command over a *century*, a troop between 80-100 soldiers. It also meant that he would have taken an oath (*sacramentum militare*) as pledge of loyalty the ‘divine’ Caesar. Furthermore, he was a Gentile.

All these would have made it very unfavourable for a Jewish rabbi to be seen communicating with the Roman centurion. Yet, Jesus refused to bow down to societal pressure. Like with the leper and Peter’s mother in-law, he did not care much of his own standing in the eyes of his fellow Jews. He was more concerned about people themselves, and decided to break boundaries and prejudices in Jewish society.



Like Jesus, we are to break boundaries and prejudices in society around us. Prejudice stops us from seeing others as people. Prejudice is like grease and dust on the eyeglasses. Once your glasses are properly cleaned, we can see the person as they are, as how Jesus would have seen them. In Christ, all barriers are broken because all are one in Christ.

There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:28)

Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all. (Colossians 3:11)

He said to them: “You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile. But God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean… Then Peter began to speak: “I now realize how true it is that God does not show favouritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right. (Acts 10:28, 34-35)

Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God. (Romans 15:7)

# Jesus values people over reputation (Matthew 5: 6-7)

“Lord,” he said, “my servant lies at home paralyzed, suffering terribly.” Jesus said to him, “Shall I come and heal him?” (Matthew 5: 6-7)

Jesus had an extraordinary openness to respond to a pagan’s request. To enter a Gentile home as a Jew would mean that the Jew will be ceremonially unclean, something that pious Jews would totally refrain from doing so, more so if one was a rabbi.

Jesus did not hesitate to serve the centurion, because He values all peoples. He was notorious for being a controversial figure for his love for people, especially those who are marginalized by society at large (Luke 15:2, Matthew 11:19). In fact, He ventures into Gentile territory to meet with these people, such as the Syro-Phoenician woman (Matthew 15:21-28), the demoniac of Gerasene (Mark 5:1-17), and the Samaritans (John 4:4–42).

Jesus did not build his reputation based on human standards. He maintained focus on His mission. There are many who followed the same path, suffered for it during their lifetimes, but left a lasting impact on the world. For example, Methodist church started out evangelism to the outliers of society such as coal miners who were not allowed to go into the church building to take part in the service because they were lower class. This led to Wesley’s open-air preaching as the group became too big to be standing outside the church building, which ran against the position of the Church of England. Another example is of Hudson Taylor, who founded the Overseas Missionary Fellowship (OMF) and advocated for missionaries to assimilate into local cultures and customs to better engage the people who the gospel was to be preached to. He was ridiculed for adopting Chinese language, dress, cuisine and refusing the comforts of an expat in China. Today, thousands all over the world have been impacted by the work of the Methodist churches and OMF International.

# Jesus recognises faith where he sees it (Matthew 5: 8-10)

The centurion replied, “Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, ‘Go,’ and he goes; and that one, ‘Come,’ and he comes. I say to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and he does it.” (Matthew 5: 8-10)

The centurion recognized the godly authority in Jesus, something that the Jews (even his followers) had missed. Jesus recognised the centurion’s faith and honoured it by healing his servant as requested.

There was no indication whether the centurion eventually became a follower of Christ. As Christians, we must recognize that the journey into faith in Christ is different for everyone. In Matthew 7:13-14, Jesus told that the path into life is small and narrow. We must learn to recognise signs of faith so that we may encourage them to stay on the path, as first step into faith comes from unexpected places and forms.

# Conclusion

Jesus was open when people made themselves open to him. We who profess to be Christians should emulate to be just like Jesus, as Christ followers and representatives of the faith. Just as Jesus did not see class, colour or creed, clear your perception and accept the people as they are. Others will come to know open door policy of Jesus through His church and His people.



Sermon summary by Adeliyn.