

November 2015

Frank W. Nelte

## **TWO EXAMPLES OF GREAT FAITH**

There are two instances in the gospels where Jesus Christ stated that certain individuals had "**great faith**". Both these instances involved someone being healed in response to the "great faith" that was exhibited. And in both cases the individuals with "great faith" were non-Israelites. Let's start by taking a look at the first example of "great faith".

### **THE CENTURION WITH GREAT FAITH**

This account is recorded in **Matthew 8:5-13** and in **Luke 7:1-10**. With the minor differences between these two accounts I believe that Matthew, an eyewitness, has the details correct, and that **Luke**, who heard this story second-hand, **has some details incorrect**. For more on this difference between these two accounts see my 2007 article "Understanding the Gospel of Luke", point #20 in that article. In this present article here I will stay with the account in Matthew 8.

A Roman centurion in Capernaum had "a servant" who was paralyzed; i.e. he was "sick of the palsy" (Matthew 8:6). So the Roman centurion comes to Jesus Christ in person, addressing Jesus Christ as "Lord".

And saying, **Lord, my servant lies at home sick of the palsy**, grievously tormented. (Matthew 8:6)

The Greek words for "my servant" here are "**pais mou**". The biblical Greek word "pais" means "a child", usually with the implication of "**a young child**". This Greek word "pais" is the root word for our English word "pediatrician", a doctor who specializes in treating children. In modern Greek "pais" means "a child" or "a boy", but in biblical Greek this word, in addition to meaning "a young child", was also used sometimes to refer to "**a servant**".

Here are some examples where the Greek word "pais" is used in Matthew's Gospel.

**Matthew 2:16 = "Herod ... slew all the children (Greek "pantas tous paidas") ... from two years old and under ...". In this Scripture we see that the word "pais" is used for children under the age of two years.**

**Matthew 17:15 = "... have mercy on my son ("mou ton huion") ...".**

**Matthew 17:18 = "... and the child ("ho pais") was cured ...". This was the case** where a child was demon-possessed and Jesus Christ cast out the demon. Verse 15 shows that this was the man's son, and verse 18 refers to this man's son as "a child". The Greek word "pais" in this context also implies that this man's son was still quite young.

**Matthew 21:15 = "... the children ("tous paidas") crying in the Temple and saying, Hosanna to the Son of David ...". Here the word "pais" is used to refer to children who were perhaps from 10-15 years old.**

So the word "pais" is clearly used to refer to children. However, the word "pais" is equally clearly used in

reference to servants.

This is clear from Matthew 12:18 which is a prophecy about Jesus Christ. **Matthew 12:18** reads: "behold, my servant ("ho pais mou") whom I have chosen ...". This is a quotation from **Isaiah 42:1**, where the Hebrew word translated as "servant" is "ebed". This Hebrew word, which is formed from a verb that means "to work", means "a man-servant, a slave".

Therefore the Greek word "pais" in Matthew 12:18 in reference to Jesus Christ clearly refers to "a servant" and not to "a child". It is because of Isaiah 42:1 that the translators got the translation for "pais" in Matthew 12:18 correct.

So let's get back to our centurion in Matthew 8:5.

The Greek for "at home" is "en te oikia", and this literally means "**in the house**". This tells us that this sick young person was living in the same house with the centurion. Houses for wealthy people back then typically also included quarters for servants and slaves, in addition to housing the whole family.

So here is the point:

Matthew 8:6 could read: "Lord, **my child** lies in the house sick of the palsy, grievously tormented".

And it could also read: "Lord, **my young servant** lies in the house sick of the palsy, grievously tormented".

The Greek text simply does not make clear whether this young person was the centurion's own child, or whether this young person was the child of one of the centurion's servants. The translators simply assumed that it had to be a servant, but it could in fact have been the centurion's own child.

Now if it is indeed a reference to "a servant", then I would take that to mean that this was the young child of one of the centurion's servants, which child would normally grow up to also be a servant of the centurion. Either way the Greek word "pais" implies **a young child rather than a mature adult**.

The significance of this is as follows:

Normally it is expected that a sick person has faith in order to be healed. However, when the sick person is a child, then a responsible adult is expected to have faith that God will heal the child. So with this young person one of two categories of people was expected to have faith: either one of the parents had to have faith, or else the owner of the "young servant" had to have faith. In this case here in Matthew 8 **the centurion was either the father or he was the owner of the child sick of the palsy**. (We're talking about an age when slavery was an accepted part of life.)

Let's continue.

For a Roman centurion to address a Jew as "Lord" already shows that this man had **humility**. And for him to personally come to Jesus Christ also showed that he had **faith** in Jesus Christ's power to heal.

If the sick child was not the centurion's own son, then personally coming to Jesus Christ also showed one other attribute of this man's character, and that was that he had **a genuine concern for the well-being of his servants**. He was humbling himself in order to help one of his servants. But the sick child could also have been his own son.

Jesus Christ readily responded with "I will come and heal him" (Matthew 8:7).

That is when the Roman centurion's faith and humility really became apparent in a powerful way. He responded as follows:

The centurion answered and said, Lord, **I am not worthy** that you should come under my roof: but **speak the word only, and my servant (or my child) shall be healed**. For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say to this [man], Go, and he goes; and to another, Come, and he comes; and to my servant, Do this, and he does [it]. (Matthew 8:8-9)

The man had an extremely humble attitude towards Jesus Christ. He was the most powerful man in Capernaum, the leader of the Roman garrison there. Yet he viewed himself as unworthy of having Jesus Christ come into his house. This was not an artificial, put-on humility, which is something that Jesus Christ would have detected instantly. This man was truly humble.

Now faith is "the evidence of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1). Real faith does not demand visual evidence. Faith is believing what God says. Real faith does not ask for a sign. This is what the centurion understood.

This centurion had a very clear understanding of the power that is vested in a position of authority. When someone in authority gives a command, then it is as good as done. There is a chain of command that ensures that orders are carried out.

So the situation with this centurion was as follows:

He clearly accepted that Jesus Christ represented God, and that therefore Christ was in the chain of authority that comes from God the Father.

This understanding the centurion expressed as follows (paraphrased):

I am under the authority of Caesar, and I myself also have men under my authority. My authority comes from Caesar, and my orders are carried out without question because the power of Caesar stands behind every order that I give. So likewise You, Lord, are under the authority of God the Father, and God the Father has given You authority over everything. So when You give an order, then that is as good as done, because it is backed by the authority of God the Father Himself. So when You, Lord, give an order, then I know that order will be carried out. I know that even without any visual proof, because **that is how a chain of authority functions**.

Jesus Christ was truly impressed with this man's grasp of what real faith is all about. And so Jesus Christ said:

When Jesus heard [it], **he marveled**, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found **so great faith**, no, not in Israel. (Matthew 8:10)

The expression "He marveled" is King James language for "He was genuinely impressed". This Roman centurion had **a better grasp** of what faith really is than anyone else Christ had met in the course of His ministry, including His own apostles. And with that foundation of a clear understanding of what faith really is, the centurion was also in a position to express real faith to a greater extent than people who lacked the understanding he had.

Notice what Jesus Christ said next:

And I say unto you, That many **shall come** from the east and west, **and shall sit down** with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom **shall be cast out** into

outer darkness: there shall be **weeping and gnashing of teeth**. (Matthew 8:11-12)

First of all, this is Jesus Christ's response to seeing a powerful example of real faith. This example of faith prompted Jesus Christ to speak about the Kingdom of God. In other words, **real faith more than anything else is the key to entry into God's Kingdom**.

Next, many coming "from the east and the west" refers to **many non-Israelites** being in the first resurrection! "Sitting down" with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob is code language for being **in the first resurrection**. Those who will make it into God's Family from the millennium and from the second resurrection are pictured as "standing" before God the Father and Jesus Christ (see Revelation 7:9-10), and not as "sitting". Those who "sit" with Abraham are the ones in the first resurrection.

Next, the reference to "the children of the kingdom" is a reference to people from the physical nations of Israel. The references to "cast out into outer darkness" and to "weeping and gnashing of teeth" are references to **death in the lake of fire**! Those are not references to coming up in the second resurrection! No, they are very clear references to the lake of fire.

So Jesus Christ presented a contrast in this statement. Christ was contrasting **many non-Israelites** being in the **first resurrection** with **many Israelites** being in the **third resurrection**, to be destroyed by the lake of fire.

Understand that "outer darkness" can never be a temporary condition! It is always presented as a permanent and final condition. Nobody will ever be "in outer darkness" for a little while, and then somehow be returned "into the light". **"Outer darkness" is permanent!**

We need to understand that in Matthew 8:12 in response to a powerful example of faith Jesus Christ said that **many Israelites will end up in the lake of fire**!

Without stating this in so many words, the implied reason for so many Israelites ending up in the lake of fire is **a lack of real faith**, which is what Paul called "the sin which does **so easily** beset us" in Hebrews 12:1.

Notice what Jesus Christ said to the centurion.

And Jesus said unto the centurion, Go your way; and **as you have believed, so be it done unto you**. And his servant (or his child) was healed in the selfsame hour. (Matthew 8:13)

In this case we know nothing at all about the child who was actually healed, the centurion's own child or a servant's child. We only know something about the person who was responsible for the child who was sick. The centurion in this case took responsibility for his servant's child (or possibly for his own son?), like a parent taking responsibility for his or her child.

There is no indication here that any sins were forgiven. Neither is there any admonition like "sin no more". Nor is there any indication that the sick individual (son or servant) had any faith in Jesus Christ. All we are told is that **the centurion had great faith**.

This is an example which illustrates that we can certainly ask God to heal people who are not in God's Church. Not only does the sick person, who is not in any way connected with God's Church, not need to be anointed; in this case Jesus Christ didn't even need **to see** the sick person.

I believe it is safe to assume that here the young person sick with the palsy had a meek and humble attitude, rather than being a rebellious youngster.

Now let's take a look at the second example of "great faith".

## **THE WOMAN WITH GREAT FAITH**

This is the case of the woman whose daughter had a severe problem with a demon. This account is recorded in **Matthew 15:21-28** and also in **Mark 7:24-30**. I discussed this particular incident at length in my November 2014 article "Understanding The Mind Of Christ". For a more detailed discussion you might refer to that article. Here I want to only briefly refer to this incident, and from a different perspective.

Here was the situation:

And, behold, **a woman of Canaan** came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, [you] Son of David; **my daughter is grievously vexed with a demon.**" (Matthew 15:22)

Like the Roman centurion in the previous example, this woman was a non-Israelite. She was clearly familiar with the Jewish religion, because she addressed Jesus Christ as "Son of David", implying a knowledge of who David had been. Implied is that she also understood that the Messiah would come as a "Son of David".

The woman was asking Jesus Christ to cast a demon out of her daughter. This means that the woman was also able to clearly recognize that her daughter had a demon problem. Today most people would have great difficulty making such a diagnosis.

Where in the case of the centurion Jesus Christ freely offered to heal "the servant" (Matthew 8:7), **in this case Jesus Christ decided to test the woman's faith** before doing anything for her. So first Jesus Christ ignored her (Matthew 15:23). Then Christ implied that He wasn't going to help her by saying: "... I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matthew 15:24).

Jesus Christ was testing whether or not this woman could be shaken off. She persisted. And when she then said directly "Lord, help me" (Matthew 15:25), Jesus Christ deliberately made a disparaging comment to her.

But he answered and said, **It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs.** (Matthew 15:26)

In making this comment Jesus Christ was giving the woman an excuse to take offense, to feel hurt and insulted. The woman obviously recognized that Jesus Christ was putting her down and comparing her to a dog. Jesus Christ didn't speak this way to or about other people. This was a test that would show very quick results.

This was **the fastest way to test the woman's faith**, by giving her the opportunity to take offense. Keep in mind that faith is a requirement for healing.

At an earlier occasion Jesus Christ had asked two blind men, "do you believe that I am able to do this?" (Matthew 9:28), and He then followed that up with "**according to your faith be it unto you**" (Matthew 9:29). Instead of asking this woman this same question, Jesus Christ said something to her that would openly and quickly reveal whether or not she had real faith.

The woman's response to Jesus Christ's statement showed that this woman really did have "great faith" in Jesus Christ and in His ability to cast the demon out of her daughter.

And she said, **Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table.** (Matthew 15:27)

She had **faith** in Christ's power to heal her daughter and she also had **humility**. This was very clear from her spontaneous unpremeditated response, because she could not possibly have anticipated Christ's statement to her.

So then Jesus Christ responded as follows:

Then Jesus answered and said unto her, **O woman, great is thy faith:** be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour. (Matthew 15:28)

Jesus Christ's statement "great is your faith" makes clear that the way Jesus Christ had dealt with her all along had been for the explicit purpose of testing her faith, something she could not possibly have known. What on the surface looked like an offensive comment was nothing more than a quick way to reveal the woman's innermost feelings and convictions. And it worked perfectly.

So here the casting out of the demon was in response to the woman's faith. Note also that here Jesus Christ also did not go personally to see the woman's daughter.

Now let's compare these two examples of "great faith".

### **A COMPARISON OF THE TWO "GREAT FAITH" EXAMPLES**

The only times Jesus Christ commended someone for "great faith" during His ministry involved two non-Israelite people, **a Roman centurion** and **a Canaanite woman**.

Both cases involved people who did not ask for healing for themselves. Both of the individuals involved asked for healing for a young person, for whom these adults felt responsible.

To the Roman centurion Jesus Christ readily said "I will come and heal him", without in any way first testing the man's faith. The Canaanite woman, on the other hand, was given a test before Jesus Christ answered her request.

Both individuals had "great faith". But Christ's statement "**I have not found** so great faith, no, **not in Israel**" is reserved for the centurion. So there was a distinction between these two expressions of "great faith". They were different in some regards, even though both were "great".

Consider the following two **hypothetical** situations:

1) **What if** Jesus Christ had said **to the centurion** "it is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs"? Would the centurion have responded the same way the Canaanite woman did? Or would he perhaps have taken offense?

2) **What if** Jesus Christ had said **to the Canaanite woman** "I will come and cast out the demon"? Would this woman have responded with "I am not worthy that You should come under my roof, but speak the word only and my daughter shall be healed"? Would she have had the understanding which the

centurion had?

The point is this:

Jesus Christ dealt with many people in unique and different ways. The way He dealt with people was always adapted to the people involved, as Jesus Christ could discern their thoughts and attitudes. Some people's attitudes were immediately apparent to Jesus Christ.

Thus, **for a Roman centurion** to personally come and address a Jew as "Lord" was a clear expression of faith and humility. So Christ did not even try to test this man's faith, but instead offered immediately to come and heal the boy, precisely because the centurion's faith was already apparent. What was not immediately apparent to Christ was **the degree and the depth of this man's faith**. That only became apparent with the man's response to Christ's offer to come and heal the boy.

[**Comment:** This is something that Luke didn't understand, which is evidenced in Luke's incorrect description of this event in Luke 7:1-10, where the centurion supposedly sent two different delegations to Jesus Christ, rather than the centurion himself coming to Christ in person. **Luke's account cannot possibly be correct**, because it would imply that, like a chess player, the centurion already had the second delegation consisting of "friends" (whoever the "friends" of a Roman centurion in a Jewish community might have been?) in place in anticipation of Jesus Christ's response. **Had the centurion only sent other people to Jesus Christ, then Christ would not have healed the "servant"**, because the centurion would have lacked humility. The idea of sending "a delegation" when only one of them would do the speaking to Christ is ridiculous! The only purpose of "a delegation" in that situation would have been to make an impression. Sending a delegation is not compatible with a "I am not worthy that You should come under my roof" attitude. **Sending a delegation of other people is not the way to approach Jesus Christ!** Matthew has the details correct, and Luke has it wrong because Luke lacked certain understanding.]

**For a poor Canaanite woman, on the other hand, to address Jesus Christ as "o Lord You Son of David" could easily have been an act of desperation, without necessarily being an expression of real faith. So Jesus Christ decided to test the woman's faith and humility in a very quick way: by presenting her with a very condescending comparison. It was a test that would show instant results, one way or the other. The woman's response to this test proved that she did have great faith in Jesus Christ.**

Now here is **the difference between these two expressions of "great faith"**. Here is why Jesus Christ described the centurion's faith as "I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel".

**The woman's faith was "great" because it was unshakable; not even a condescending attitude towards her could shake that faith. Her faith was persistent. She believed with all her heart that Jesus Christ had the power to cast the demon out of her daughter, and she had a genuine humility. But her faith was not based on any particular understanding of what was involved when Jesus Christ healed people and when He cast out demons. She just believed very firmly that He was the promised Son of David, i.e. the Messiah.**

**The centurion's faith was also unshakable. He too believed that Jesus Christ had the power to heal people. But in addition to that unshakable belief the centurion also had a fairly good understanding regarding what happens when a person is healed by God. Nobody else that Jesus Christ had met during His ministry had possessed as clear a grasp of what faith actually is as this Roman centurion. By contrast, to His own disciples Jesus Christ repeatedly said "o you of little faith" (Matthew 6:30; Matthew 8:26; Matthew 14:31; Matthew 16:8).**

Put another way: Faith means that we believe that Jesus Christ can heal any sickness or affliction. That is the faith we must have when we ask God to heal us. But **that level of faith doesn't necessarily understand what actually happens when God heals us**, and here I mean beyond the fact that the sacrifice of Jesus Christ is applied to us when we are healed.

To understand what actually happens when God heals us is **a higher level of faith**. And that is the level of faith that the Roman centurion had. The centurion's faith was the greatest faith Jesus Christ had encountered during His ministry because the centurion understood that **divine healing is an expression of the delegation and the extension of God's power!**

This is **the basis** for the centurion's statement "**speak the word only and my 'servant' shall be healed**". The centurion understood very clearly that God had delegated to Jesus Christ (another way of saying "given to Jesus Christ") the power of God. That's along the lines of what Jesus Christ said after His resurrection, that "**all power is given unto Me** (i.e. delegated to Me) in heaven and in earth" (Matthew 28:18). And the centurion understood that, in order to exert that power, **Christ Himself did not need to be present** at the location where that power would be used.

The centurion was way ahead of other people at that time, as far as his understanding of faith was concerned. This better understanding also distinguished his "great faith" from the "great faith" of the Canaanite woman.

When we consider the subject of faith, then we commonly look at Hebrews 11, the faith chapter. That chapter presents numerous Old Testament examples of faith. These two examples of "great faith" in the gospel accounts likewise present valuable lessons for the people of God's Church.

Frank W Nelte