

A MARVELOUS EXAMPLE OF FAITH

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Jesus Christ had such a thorough understanding of the nature of man that he was seldom surprised by what people did. John 2:24-25 says that “he knew all men, and needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man.” Many times we read about the Lord’s conduct causing men to “marvel” (meaning *to wonder at*). In Mark 6:1-6, the unbelief of the people of Christ’s home country of Nazareth caused him to marvel. The only other time that the scriptures speak of Jesus marveling was at the demonstration of faith by a Roman centurion.

Roman centurions in Bible times

In Roman times, a centurion was an officer in command of a “century,” which at full strength contained 100 soldiers, as the name suggests. These leaders were professional soldiers and were chosen for their all-around military skills and leadership abilities. It goes without saying that these men were the leaders of one of the mightiest and most accomplished militaries that this world has ever known. Of course, these men were not Jews either. The ones who lived in Israel during the First Century A.D. were there as foreign occupiers, although they clearly came into contact with the religious beliefs of the Jews while stationed there. In Luke 3:14, they were among the throngs of people seeking to hear to the word of God from John the Baptist. They were warned against being violent, making false accusations, and taking bribes. One centurion at the foot of Christ’s cross saw all the events of that amazing day and responded by glorifying God and declaring that Jesus was truly the Son of God (Matt 27:54; Mark 15:39; Luke 23:47). Another centurion, named Cornelius, was the head of a family that became the first Gentile Christians (Acts 10). Yet another centurion saved the life of the Apostle Paul when their ship was wrecked on the island of Melita (Acts 27:42-43). These are all noteworthy examples of Roman soldiers whose hearts were turned to their Creator.

The centurion in Capernaum

Of all these examples of Roman centurions with faith in God, none surpass that of the one who lived in Capernaum during the time of Christ’s ministry in Galilee. This man asked Jesus to heal his

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(continued)

servant who was sick and ready to die (Luke 7:1-2; Matt 8:5-6). But this Roman soldier was so humble that he did not come and ask Jesus directly for this miracle. He sent the elders of the Jews to ask Jesus on his behalf (Luke 1:3-5). They were willing to do this, as they testified of this man's worthiness of the deed, as he was one who loved the Jewish people and had even built them a synagogue (Luke 7:4-5). When Jesus came to his house, the Roman sent his friends out to Jesus to tell him that he was not worthy to have Jesus enter under his roof (Luke 1:6; Matt 8:8) or even to come out to Jesus personally (Luke 7:7). He said, "Speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed. For 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, Do this, and he doeth it" (Matt 8:8-9). He understood that the miraculous power Jesus had meant that Jesus had authority from God. As a soldier who himself had been given a position of authority, he understood that the one in authority must only speak the word and it must be obeyed. Therefore, the Roman centurion told Jesus to just "say in a word, and my servant shall be healed" (Luke 7:7). We know of one miracle Jesus had performed from a distance prior to this (John 4:46-54), which was also in Capernaum (John 4:46; Luke 7:1). The centurion's faith in the authority that Jesus had from God was so strong, he knew all Jesus had to do was speak the word. This centurion's faith was so strong that "When Jesus heard these things, he marveled at him, and turned him about, and said unto the people that followed him, I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel" (Luke 7:9; Matt 8:10). Jesus had not seen such a faith in anyone of Israel, and the faith of this Roman soldier amazed him. When the centurion's friends got back inside the house, they found the servant that had been sick was completely healed (Matt 8:13; Luke 7:10). This Roman soldier displayed a greater understanding of the principle of authority and had a greater faith than any of the Israelites whom Jesus had met. We need to have a faith like his.