

**MINISTRY BY MAIL**  
**Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship**  
[www.lutheranlccf.org](http://www.lutheranlccf.org)  
**Second Sunday after Epiphany, January 18, 2015**

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 342, 65:1, 294, 447, 283.

Lessons: 2 Kings 5:1-19, Romans 12:16-21, Luke 7:1-10

Sermon Text: Matthew 8:1-13.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

The words in our sermon text could easily be several sermons: one about healing a man from leprosy and one about healing the servant of a Roman centurion. But we keep them together, as the ancient church did when selecting this as a text for the Epiphany season, to show that believing Gentiles, too, have a place in the kingdom of God. Today we see that

**JESUS PERFORMS MIRACLES**

- 1. He heals a leper**
- 2. Jesus heals the servant of a Gentile.**
- 3. Jesus warns those who have the truth of God's Word to be wary lest they lose it!**

Jesus has just finished the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew chapters five through seven. *"When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law."* (Matthew 7:28-29) Matthew records before the Sermon on the Mount that *"Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. News about him spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed, and he healed them."* (Matthew 4:23-24) When the people heard Jesus speak, they recognized that he spoke with authority, and now his words will be further validated by the mighty works he performs.

When he comes down from the mountain where he was preaching, large crowds are still following him. Jesus then performs two miracles. One is healing a man with leprosy. Luke tells us he was *"covered with leprosy"*. (Luke 5:12) so it was obviously a severe case of leprosy. He approached Jesus with the statement *"Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean."* Immediately he was cured of his leprosy. *"Then Jesus said to him, 'See that you don't tell anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the gift Moses commanded, as a testimony to them.'"* It seems strange to us that Jesus tells him to tell no one, considering that Jesus tells us that we are to go and make disciples of all nations and that we are to preach the gospel to the entire world. But remember that this is very early in Jesus' ministry, and he tells his followers a number of times that his time has not yet come, meaning that it is not yet time for him to be taken prisoner, suffer, and die. But Mark tells us: *"Instead he went out and began to talk freely, spreading the news. As a result, Jesus could no longer enter a town openly but stayed outside in lonely places. Yet the people still came to him from everywhere."* (Mark 1:45)

As Jesus' ministry went on, the leaders of the Jews were more and more anxious to kill him so that they would be rid of him. Of course this miracle was immediately obvious to many people and news about Jesus' healing abilities spread widely and quickly as Matthew tells us even after our sermon text: *"many who were demon-possessed were brought to him, and he drove out the spirits with a word and healed all the sick."* (Matthew 8:16)

We must also remember that leprosy is a picture of the leprosy of sin that completely infects all of us. Jesus came to earth to heal us of the leprosy of sin, to free us from the slavery of sin, death, and the power of the devil.

The second miracle in our text is the history of the servant of a centurion whom Jesus healed. The circumstances are quite strange. The centurion is a Roman soldier with great authority, a man in charge of 100 men. He came to Jesus *“asking for help. ‘Lord,’ he said, ‘my servant lies at home paralyzed and in terrible suffering.’”*

Jesus is willing to go and heal him and *“said to him, ‘I will go and heal him.’”*

But notice the centurion’s answer. *“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.”*

This centurion recognized his sinfulness. He acknowledged that he was unworthy to have such a great healer come to his house. He did not deserve that Jesus should come to him, a Gentile. He is a man who knows all about authority and giving commands and having commands obeyed. Did you notice that he did not command Jesus to come and heal his servant? Did you notice that he did not even ask Jesus to come and heal the servant? He simply stated a fact, hoping his servant would be healed. We have no clue whether this servant was Jewish or Gentile, but that is not relevant to what happens.

The centurion simply made his need known to Jesus and trusted Jesus to do the right thing for his servant. Jesus immediately promised to go to the centurion’s house and heal his servant. But the centurion realized that a pious Jew would never go into the home of a Gentile, and he wanted to spare Jesus any embarrassment. So he sent some friends to assure Jesus that he did not expect him to come into a Gentile home. He was certain that Jesus could heal his servant without even seeing him. As an army officer, he understood how he could command the soldiers under him and they would obey immediately without question. Similarly, Jesus as the Son of God had power over every kind of disease and all the forces of nature. And he exercised that power by healing the centurion’s servant without even seeing him.

Notice Jesus’ response. *“When Jesus heard this, he was astonished and said to those following him, ‘I tell you the truth, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith.’”* Then Matthew concludes this history with Jesus’ words to the centurion: *“Go! It will be done just as you believed it would.’ And his servant was healed at that very hour.”*

Jesus was astonished that a Gentile would have such great faith. The centurion was a foreigner. We have no idea how long he had lived among the Jews, but he had obviously learned some things from them. But more importantly he had learned enough about Jesus Christ to have faith in him. Had he personally heard Jesus before this? We don’t know. Had he personally observed Jesus’ sermon on the mountain side? We don’t know. We could guess that the Roman law-keepers would have had at least some people watching such a great crowd who was listening to a popular teacher. The Romans were often concerned about uprisings among the people whom they were ruling. But Jesus praises his faith.

Not only is this amazement at the faith of a Gentile, but it is also a very strong indictment of the lack of faith to be found in the people of Israel.

Israel was a nation that had been waiting nearly 2000 years since the promise of a Savior had been given to Abraham, the father of their nation. But in all that time the Messiah had not come. But now that he has come, Israel in general does not recognize him as the Messiah. He’s not really the kind of leader that they wanted. He’s not really the kind of Savior that they were looking for. And he’s definitely not the Messiah that they wanted. Had they heard the Scriptures but forgotten all of the marvelous promises about the Messiah as a Savior from sin?

Jesus makes a very harsh statement about the Jews. He *“said to those following him, ‘I tell you the truth, 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.’”*

Not only had Jesus not found anyone in Israel with such great faith, but he also says ***“that many will come from the east and the west”*** that is, many who are not Jewish will come from foreign countries, ***“and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.”***

What a slap in the face to the Jews! They surely knew that their ancestors, Abraham and Isaac and Jacob would be seated at the feast in the kingdom of heaven. They also thought that they should be there, too. But with Gentiles? The uncircumcised Gentiles sitting at the feast in heaven with their Jewish ancestors?

A number of times in his ministry Jesus would rebuke Jews. Even John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus, had told the Jews ***“Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham.”*** (Luke 3:8)

How dare this preacher, even if he was a great healer, tell them that Gentiles would take the place that they assumed would be their place in heaven! This isn’t the only place in the Scriptures where Jews are warned that their ancestry wouldn’t get them into heaven. Paul has a great deal to say in his letter to the Romans about how Jews forfeited their place in the kingdom of heaven. Throughout the New Testament Paul emphasizes that Gentiles too will be joined with believing Jews in the kingdom of heaven.

At this point, this early in his ministry, Jesus is obviously stepping on a lot of toes. He obviously is not making a lot of Jews happy. And he goes on with an even sharper statement than saying he hasn’t found such faith in Israel. ***“But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”***

How could such a thing happen? How is it that Gentiles, people from other nations, would be seated at the feast in heaven with their ancestors and they, members of the visible kingdom of the Jews, would be thrown out into the darkness? And Jesus tells us what will happen in that kind of darkness. ***“There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”*** There will be endless despair.

Jesus commended the faith of this centurion and promised that many more Gentiles from all over the earth would be received into his kingdom. He also warned that many ***“subjects of the kingdom,”*** that is, physical descendants of Abraham who did not share Abraham's faith in the Savior, would be cast into outer darkness. They would be permanently separated from the presence of their Lord and Savior and would suffer eternal damnation in hell. Their ***“weeping and gnashing of teeth”*** would never end.

What can we take home from this? Well, haven’t we – most of us – had the truth of the Word of God all of our lives? Haven’t we had the Word of God in its truth and purity all our lives? And some of us, that is, the older ones among us, have had to fight to keep the whole truth of the Word of God in our lives. Some of us have lived long enough to remember two major battles with churches with whom we were once affiliated when they were straying from the Word of God in their doctrine and/or their practice.

But many of the hearers of this sermon, and that is many of you, haven’t really had to fight for the truth of the Word of God to be preserved in your midst. It’s easy to take something for granted, if we haven’t taken ownership of it with struggle. It’s easy to take something for granted when it’s been handed to us on a silver platter as it were. But I do not say this to boast. I say this to remind and warn us that just because we have had God’s Word for a long time, or have been faithful for a long time, or have had parents and grandparents who have been faithful; that will not get us into heaven. The Word of God makes it very clear that it is the faith of the individual that gets him or her into the kingdom of heaven.

We must be careful lest we lose the truth of the Word of God, lest we take it for granted or ignore it or become indifferent to it. The devil, our old evil foe, is doing everything he can to take our faith and the truth of God’s Word away from us. Daily, we must ***“Fight the good fight With all thy might!”*** We can’t do it by ourselves. We must always remember that ***“Christ is thy Strength and Christ thy Right. Lay hold on life, and it shall be Thy joy and crown eternally.”*** (TLH 447:1) Lord, preserve us unto life eternal in the kingdom of heaven! Amen.