



gracefellowship

Series: ~~un~~Worthy: Calling the Outcasts
Date: September 3, 2023

Title: A Call to Compassion
Passage: Matthew 8:5-13

Scripture Reading: Matthew 8:1-4

Have you ever been in a place where you've had to humbly ask someone for help? I constantly have to ask my kids how technology works! Although my son bought a record player recently and I had to show him a few things about how to make that primitive technology work!

Have you ever had to go to someone you felt like was beneath you, or even an enemy and ask them for help?

Illustration: I saw an interview this week of Tom Brady talking about getting together with Peyton Manning in the offseason when they were both in the prime of their NFL careers and asking Peyton about one of their most successful plays. Peyton told him what they did to make the play successful, which Tom took back and implemented with the Patriots. He said that play made Rob Gronkowski a Pro Bowler and won their team a bunch of games. That made me so mad! Peyton shouldn't be sharing with an enemy like that!

In the passage we are looking at today Jesus is approached by someone the entire nation of Israel would consider not only an outcast in God's Kingdom, but an enemy. Look at Matthew 8.

:: Matthew 8:5-13

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

⁶ "Lord," he said, "my servant lies at home paralyzed, suffering terribly."

⁷ Jesus said to him, "Shall I come and heal him?"

⁸ 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.

⁹ 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."

¹⁰ 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.

¹¹ 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.

¹² But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

¹³ 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.

A Centurion = Roman oppressor

The Romans thought of Jews as dogs. So for a Roman to come to a Jewish Rabbi and ask for help is amazing! Imagine the humility it took for this man to come to Jesus publicly and ask for help. When we read that sentence it doesn't really register because we have never been under the thumb of an occupying force telling us what we can and can't do. But when Matthew's audience read this they would have been aghast!

The centurion came to Jesus with incredible humility and this is important for us to see because we all have to come to Jesus with this kind of humility. God offers us salvation through Jesus, but we have to recognize our need for Him and come in absolute humility understanding that our pride gets in the way of saving faith.

:: James 4:4-10

⁴ You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.

⁵ Or do you think Scripture says without reason that he jealously longs for the spirit he has caused to dwell in us?

⁶ But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: “God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble.”

⁷ Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

⁸ Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

⁹ Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom.

¹⁰ Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.

When James says God opposes the proud that's a military term; it means “He sets His armies against.”

He opposes the proud, but lifts up the humble.

Our pride will tell us that we have no need for God- we can do life on our own. That kind of pride causes us not to reach out for Him in faith for salvation.

So, what is it that makes this Roman Centurion come to Jesus with such a humble demonstration, asking for help? Matthew tells us that he has a servant who is sick. This is another way we find that there is something amazing about this specific Centurion- servants were not highly valued in the Roman world. Most Romans would just let a servant die without showing any concern for them at all. This Centurion values his servant and comes to Jesus asking Him to heal the man. This is an incredible example of compassion.

In fact, Matthew connects this story with something Jesus had just done to show compassion to another outcast. In Matthew 8:1-4 Jesus has an interaction with a man who has leprosy.

:: Matthew 8:1-4

1 When Jesus came down from the mountainside, large crowds followed him.

2 A man with leprosy came and knelt before him and said, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean."

3 Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" Immediately he was cleansed of his leprosy.

4 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."

When this man comes to Jesus there are crowds all around Him. This was an unusual thing because Lepers were expected to stay away from people. They were relegated to living outside of populated areas. Any time they came near someone they had to call out, "Unclean!" This made sure people knew they were about to come into contact with someone who, if they touched them, would make them ceremonial unclean for 6 days. This meant you couldn't go to the Temple or the Synagogue and you couldn't do a lot of things that allowed you to be part of normal daily life in the community.

Being unclean didn't mean you were sinful. That can be a popular misconception when we read the Bible. There were a lot of things that could make you unclean. In fact, on some level being unclean was just a normal part of life in the Jewish community. After becoming unclean there was a period of time or a ritual ceremony you would go through (or both) to be considered "clean" again. But a stigma was attached to certain things more than others and leprosy was one of those things.

Here's what we find when the man with leprosy comes to Jesus: Jesus doesn't heal the guy by speaking, like we say Jesus do last week with the people in the Decapolis; Jesus reached out and touched the man! Jesus showed incredible

compassion, giving this man something he had been missing for potentially years- physical touch!

Now remember, touching someone with leprosy made you ceremonially unclean for 6 days. And for Jesus it was totally worth it!

Compassion is love in action!

How can showing compassion change someone's life?

Years ago I read a story in the book *Chicken Soup for the Soul* about a boy named Kyle, a freshman in high school, who, one Friday afternoon, cleared his locker out and was walking home with his backpack and his arms full of books. Some boys saw him and ran up to him from behind, knocking the books out of his arms, knocking him to the ground and his glasses went flying off into the dirt. Another boy saw the event take place and went over to Kyle, helping him pick up his things and find his glasses. The boy made a comment about how those guys were jerks and Kyle didn't deserve being treated like that. Kyle thanked him for helping him then they discovered they lived near one another, so they walked home together and talked along the way.

After that day the two became great friends and over the next three years developed an incredible friendship. Kyle did what many high school kids do and blossomed in his Junior and Senior Years, eventually becoming the class valedictorian. At graduation he was invited to give the commencement address to his class. During his speech Kyle told the story of the day he was carrying his books home from school and made a new friend after some bullies had attacked him. What Kyle had never told anyone was the reason he was carrying all his books home that day. Kyle had intended to take his life over the weekend because he didn't think anyone cared about him. The boy that came to his aid really came to his rescue. In front of the entire audience he shared the lowest point in his life and how one act of compassion changed his life forever!

Someone you know needs a kind word.

Someone needs a loving touch.

Someone you know would be forever changed by an act of servant hood.

Showing compassion- love in action- to someone could change their life forever! When the Centurion came to Jesus he demonstrated that he cared about his servant as much more than property, but as a human being with value and worth.

But this is where we see another level of humility on the part of the centurion. When Jesus offers to come to his house to heal the servant, the Roman officer responds:

:: Matthew 8:8-9

⁸ 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.

⁹ 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.”

In truth, going into the home of the Roman would once again have made Jesus unclean. And this man understood the religious customs of the Jews. He tells Jesus he isn't worthy to have him come into his home but he believes Jesus can just speak the word and his servant will be healed. He demonstrates belief in Jesus' divine power to heal his servant from anywhere.

Now, the response Jesus gives had to be earth-shattering to the Jewish crowd listening to this exchange:

:: Matthew 8:10-12

10 ...”Truly I tell you, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith.

11 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.

12 But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

What Jesus said about this Roman Centurion was a huge slap in the face to every Jewish person hearing this story! Not only does Jesus say that the Roman has greater faith than everyone in Israel, He says that Jewish people aren't going to be in God's Kingdom and people like this Roman, people from the East and West, would be in God's Kingdom!

Here's what I want us to hear today, because this is what Matthew is trying to get across to us:

Just because you think you're in, doesn't mean you're in!

- Growing up in church doesn't mean you're part of God's Kingdom.
- Being able to quote some Bible verses doesn't mean you're in God's Kingdom.
- Tithing doesn't mean you have a place in heaven.

Those you think are out of the Kingdom, may not be out!

Jesus told another story about two men who went up the Temple to pray. A Pharisee and a tax collector stood praying publicly.

:: Luke 18:11-14

¹¹ The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector.

¹² I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’

¹³ “But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’

¹⁴ “I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

Jesus was amazed by the faith of the centurion and his humble belief in Jesus. The only other time we read that Jesus was amazed is found in Mark 6:1-6.

:: Mark 6:1-6

6 Jesus left there and went to his hometown, accompanied by his disciples.

² When the Sabbath came, he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were amazed.

“Where did this man get these things?” they asked. “What’s this wisdom that has been given him? What are these remarkable miracles he is performing?

³ Isn’t this the carpenter? Isn’t this Mary’s son and the brother of James, Joseph,^[a] Judas and Simon? Aren’t his sisters here with us?” And they took offense at him.

⁴ Jesus said to them, “A prophet is not without honor except in his own town, among his relatives and in his own home.”

⁵ He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. ⁶ He was amazed at their lack of faith.

Those who humble themselves, walking in daily faith and obedience to Jesus are in God’s Kingdom.

Those who see no need for humility, who lean on their religious practices to save them, are not in God’s Kingdom.

If you consider yourself a citizen of God’s Kingdom, ask yourself, “Why?”

If the answer is anything other than, “I have placed my faith in Jesus Christ to be my Lord and Savior,” then you are not a citizen of God’s Kingdom.

Jesus doesn’t care about your past. He doesn’t care if you’re viewed by religious people as an outcast. He is looking for one thing: faith in Him.

As Christians, we are called to be compassionate and to show the love of Jesus to everyone. Stop judging people based on what they’ve done in their past, how they dress, where they live, the color of their skin, their political beliefs, their

sexual orientation or whatever else you think makes them unclean. That's exactly who we should be going to and giving a personal touch, showing compassion and mercy. That alone gives us the opportunity to share the gospel with them and be heard.

Closing Prayer:

Father, help me to live this day to the full, being true to You, in every way.

Jesus, help me to give myself away to others, being kind to everyone I meet.

Spirit, help me to love the lost, proclaiming Christ in all I do and say.

Amen.