

Adam Smith: Insiders and Outsiders

Matthew 8 beginning in verse 5. When he had entered Capernaum, a centurion came forward to him, appealing to him, Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, suffering terribly. And he said to him, I will come and heal him. But the centurion replied, Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof, but only say the word and my servant will be healed.

For I too am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. And I say to one, go, and he goes, and to another, come, and he comes, and to my servant, do this, and he does it. When Jesus heard this, he marveled and said to those who followed him, truly, I tell you, with no one in Israel have I found such faith.

I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness. In that place, there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. And to the centurion, Jesus said, go, let it be done for you as you have believed.

And the servant was healed at that very moment. Let's pray together. Father, at your word, all things that have been made were made.

You said, let there be light and light had to come into existence just to obey the word of the king of kings and Lord of lords. And God, as we read your word, as you have spoken your desire over the centurion, over his household, over his servant, Lord, you can speak your desire over us and it'll be done. And so Lord, would you speak by your spirit through your word to your people today? God, would you speak to us today and teach us? Would you speak to us today and show us your beauty? Show us your glory.

Show us, Lord, what you desire to do in our lives today. God, we submit ourselves to you, humbly listening to you, God. Be exalted, be glorified.

May we be transformed in your presence. In Jesus name. Amen.

Amen. You may be seated. Well, imagine that you are at a big family reunion.

Okay, it's Mother's Day. We can talk about family. You all know how family reunions go.

You know that environment. You know what it's like to show up and see a bunch of people who are all supposedly family. And yet you gravitate toward your small circle of people, right? Your siblings, your immediate family, the cousins you grew up with, the people that you know well.

And you look around at the rest of them and just wonder, how are these people related to me? Right? You know like the weird uncle and you know the people that like, you know how they're related and maybe you wish that they weren't, but like, you know them. But then there's like, there's like degrees of cousins that you didn't know existed. Okay.

At my family reunions, it was bonkers, man. Like you'd show up and there'd be people there like, you know, you ever go to a family reunion and meet someone who's actually not family? My sister did. She dated him for a while.

That was weird. It wasn't family, but he was there. Anyway, that was a lot funnier in my head, guys.

You need to give me something here. Let me start over. Imagine you're at a big family reunion.

Family reunions are awkward enough as they are. And some of you, you look forward to them. Some of you, when they're happening, you're counting the minutes until they're over.

But imagine you're at a family reunion and into the environment walks someone who is not family. Not only are they not family, but they're known by the family. They're an enemy of the family, so to speak.

Maybe they've done some real harm to the family. Maybe they sued a member of the family. Maybe they've committed some sort of violence against a member of the family.

They've betrayed somebody that the family loves. Either way, everyone in the room sees them walk in and immediately thinks to themselves, they don't belong here. They shouldn't be here.

And then dinner starts and grandpa stands up, right? The patriarch. He stands up and he clinks his glass, gets everyone's attention, says, I have an announcement to make. This person, this enemy of the family, not only are they welcome at my table, but they get a share of the inheritance.

Imagine the shock, the offense of that. If it couldn't get worse, it does. He says, not only are they getting a share of the inheritance, but some of you grandkids, you're cut out.

Some of you who believe the inheritance belongs to you, you're being cut out and this person is coming in. That emotional offense that you just felt to that concept is exactly what Jesus' audience would have experienced at his words in this text. Jesus says that many outsiders, many of those from the East and from the West, will recline at the eternal banquet with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, while the sons of the kingdom, those to whom the kingdom belongs by genealogy, they are ousted.

And with that one statement, Jesus completely dismantles our categories for who is in and who is out of the kingdom, about who will receive the kingdom blessing and who will be cast out of the kingdom altogether. And what we need to learn today is that the kingdom of God does not follow our presumed guest list. See, last week we looked at Jesus' healing of the leper.

If you were here, you remember that. If not, I really invite you to go back and listen. We're moving through Matthew and all of the things that we're talking about build upon one another.

And last week we talked about Jesus healing the leper, the untouchable man, remember? The excluded man, the man cut off from the worshiping community of God because of their uncleanness. He was an outsider. He was an outcast of outcasts.

And now Matthew gives us another outsider, but he's a different kind of outsider. You see, the leper was excluded because of a tragedy, a tragic health condition. But this man is excluded because of allegiance.

He's not just a Gentile. He's not just a non-Jewish person, a member outside of the covenant people of Israel. This is a centurion, a Roman military leader of a hundred foot soldiers.

He is an active participant in the oppression of God's people. See, Israel at this time was not free. They were ruled by Rome.

And this man was a symbol of Caesar's oppression, Caesar's domination of Israel. And so everybody watching this moment unfold already knows how it's supposed to go. Okay, at the minimum, Jesus needs to keep his distance.

Gentiles are unclean and Roman soldiers are the enemy. But remember, that's what people expected. That's how they expected him to respond to the leper.

And so Jesus doesn't follow our expectations. And so here, curiosity would be through the roof. We've seen what he did to a man unclean.

Now what's going to happen to this enemy of God's people? This violent oppressor. But let's recall what the people may have hoped would happen, right? They expected, the Israelites expected that Messiah would come. God would send a savior, a warrior king, who would wield a sword and cleanse Israel of their oppressors.

And so what the people want Jesus to do is not just keep his distance. What they want Jesus to do is to judge this man, to condemn this man, to wield the sword and destroy this man. What they want is for Jesus to remove Rome from the land.

And yet what Matthew keeps showing us is that the kingdom of God completely destroys the categories for what we believe is obvious. The people that you don't expect to be in are in. And this is good news for us today because Jesus does not destroy and he does not ignore outsiders.

Rather, Jesus welcomes outsiders by faith. Jesus welcomes those who we would be tempted to accuse or reject or push outside. Jesus welcomes outsiders.

Verse 5 says, When he entered Capernaum, a centurion came forward appealing to him saying, Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, suffering terribly. Now, right now you got to see this man's faith. Okay, first of all, here's a Roman soldier, a Roman centurion.

He's wearing like the armor. He's got the garb, the full regalia. He comes to Jesus and he calls Jesus Lord.

Romans did not call Jewish teachers Lord. Like dog, maybe. Slave, for sure, not Lord.

They do not call them Lord. And yet he acknowledges not only who Jesus is to Israel, but he acknowledges Jesus' authority over himself, calling him Lord. And second, he comes with his need.

He says, my servant is paralyzed, suffering terribly. And notice he doesn't tell Jesus what to do. He doesn't ask in this moment for anything.

He may be implying, but he's just revealing his need. He simply acknowledges the authority of Jesus and he makes his need known. Now, listen, this is a wonderful example of the prayer of faith.

This is a wonderful example of someone coming to Jesus in faith, making their need known. Prayer need not be any more complicated than this. Simply acknowledging Christ's authority and making your need known to him.

You may not know how you want him to move. Maybe you do know how you want him to move, but you don't have to. You can simply trust that he knows what is good and that he will step into your need with you and bring about what he believes is good.

And so Jesus meets the man in his faith and immediately says, I'll come and heal him. Lord, my servant is at home suffering terribly. I will come and heal him.

I will come to where your servant is in your house and heal him. I will come into the home of a Gentile, risking the uncleanness that that brings on to a Jewish person. The ceremonial uncleanness.

I will go into that home. Not only does he not reject him, not only does he not ignore him, but he says, I am going to come into your home. I am going to grace your house with my presence.

I am going to come to you. I'm going to go out of my way and go into your house to heal your need. I will come and heal him.

Listen, if you come to Christ in faith, recognizing who he is and his authority over your life, and you make your need known to him, here is something that you can be certain of. He will come into your life and do what he has declared to be good. If you come to Christ in faith, he will not say to you, clean up your life first.

He will not say to you, obey the scriptures first. He will not say to you, prove yourself first. He doesn't tell.

He doesn't tell. This Roman oppressor denounced Caesar first. Lay down your sword, sir, says I will come and heal him.

Listen, if you're here today and you are longing for this Lord, this Savior to step into your need, into your life, he does not come to you and say, you know, recite to me this bulleted list of theological points, and then I will come to you, or articulate the doctrine of the Trinity. And he says, I will come. I will come and heal him.

That's the heart of Jesus. There is no limit to what he is able to do when we come to him in faith, and we come to him and say, Lord, I need help. Lord, I'm sick.

Lord, my marriage is falling apart. Lord, my children are astray. Lord, my addiction is out of control.

Lord, I feel helpless. And Jesus does not recoil. He does not judge you.

He's willing to step into your mess and bring the healing and the restoration to what is broken. I will come and heal him. But the centurion responds.

He says, Lord, I'm not worthy. Lord, I'm not worthy to have you come under my roof. Only say the word.

Just say the word. Lord, just speak. Just say the word and it'll be done.

Check out his faith. He says, if you are the one, excuse me, allergies are crazy right now. Tree pollen, am I right? He says, if you are the one that has the authority to do this, if you're the one who actually has the authority to touch the leper and to cleanse him, if you're the one who actually has the authority to do these things, then I know as a man of authority that all you need to do is say the word.

You don't need to be there because you don't rule by your presence. You rule by your word. He says, if I say to my servant, go, he goes.

If I say, come, he comes. If I say, do this, he does it. So I know that if you're the one that has this authority, thank you so much, Aaron.

Appreciate that. If you are the ones who has this authority, all you have to do is say the word and it will be done. And so think about that.

Think about the words of Jesus, right? The gospel of John says that all things were made through him. Colossians 1 says that all things were made by him and for him. And so at the creation of the universe, the God of creation spoke a word and it was made.

The healing of someone at home is simple for the one who made light come out of darkness, who

made the heavens and the earth and everything in them. It is nothing. Guys, that's what this is.

This is not just a book. It's not just words on a page. This is the divine authority of the creator spoken to us.

Is some of it confusing? Yeah, as we would expect the wisdom of the creator to be beyond our comprehension. But is it good? Absolutely. Y'all, if you're not opening this every single day, you are leaving treasure on the table.

You are not saved by reading this. You're not saved by how much time you spend in God's word, but God's word in your life brings healing. Don't avoid it.

Don't ignore it. Be healed by it. The authority that this centurion ascribes to Jesus.

Jesus is mesmerized. It says that he marvels. You realize how rare that is in scripture? I can find a couple of times where God is amazed, right? One is he's amazed at the lack of faith in Nazareth, in Nazareth, his hometown.

He shows up and they're like, I am astonished. I am amazed at how little you believe. There's also in Isaiah, God is amazed that no one can be found to intercede for the people.

Like sin is so rampant that he can't even find a man to like pray and God is amazed. But here he is amazed at the faith of an enemy. He says, truly, I tell you with no one in Israel have I found such faith.

Israel had the scriptures. They had the prophets. They had the covenant.

They had the sacrifices. They had the promises of God. They had the temple.

They had the presence of God in the temple. They had the law. And yet many still failed to recognize the king who stood in front of them and meanwhile, this outsider sees him clearly.

The people that you don't expect to be in often are. But there's more. He says, I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.

That means outsiders, Gentiles, the nations, the people outside of the covenant people of God, people who are assumed to be far from God, people like this centurion will sit down at the kingdom banquet with Abraham himself, the patriarchs, the one to whom the promises have come. They, those outside of his family will experience the blessing given to his family while Jesus says, the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into outer darkness. Who are the sons of the kingdom? The descendants of Abraham.

The sons of the kingdom are Israel, the covenant people, the insiders, the people most certain that they belonged. Jesus says outsiders are welcomed by faith, but also in this text, Jesus warns

insiders of their presumption. Jesus says many outsiders are entering the kingdom through faith while many insiders are in danger of exclusion because of unbelief.

That would have not only sounded outrageous, but it would have sounded offensive because the assumption was that these are Abraham's descendants. The promises came to Abraham for his family. And so the kingdom belongs to them.

The offense that they'd be experiencing is the same offense that a grandchild would experience if grandpa's inheritance was going to their elementary school bully. I'm out and that person is in? Are you kidding me? See, I'll never forget the time that this hit me in a really significant way. This idea of, I was presuming that I was okay.

I had just graduated Bible college. I had just taken my first full-time ministry gig and I was reading my Bible in my tiny apartment in Hollywood. And I was reading through the gospel of John and I came to the scene in the gospel of John where Jesus tells the Pharisees, you search the scriptures because in them, you believe you have eternal life.

And yet they testify to me and you refuse to come to me that I may give you life. And in this moment, like a ton of bricks, I just had this feeling, this almost like this, uh-oh, like, oh no feeling when I realized that knowing about Jesus is not the same thing as knowing Jesus. That my ability to preach the gospel is not the same thing as actually believing the gospel for myself.

That this passion I had to defend the faith is not the same thing as having faith. It's not the same thing as having trust in Jesus. And I realized in that moment that my life is not about a decision that I made years ago to put my faith in Jesus, but faith in Jesus needs to be every day, all day, time and time again, allowing Jesus to carry the weight of our lives.

It's not just believing things about him. It's allowing him to carry us. It's allowing him to hold us.

It's allowing him to have authority over our lives and to tell us which way we ought to go. And that's exactly what Jesus is warning here. The sons of the kingdom assumed that they were in because they were near the kingdom, because they had the scriptures, because they knew the law.

But proximity to the kingdom is not the same thing as trusting the king. Familiarity with Jesus is not the same thing as faith in Jesus. I was teaching a chapel this week at Providence School and was reminded of an illustration that I've used before that for me helps to understand what faith looks like in our lives.

And it looks like bungee jumping. Okay, you can believe that bungee jumping would be fun. You can have faith that the bungee cord will not break.

But until you jump, you've not trusted anything. Until you actually jump, you have not trusted the

bungee to carry the weight of your life. And so this centurion is a great example of what it looks like to jump.

Because by coming to Jesus, he's risking everything. Calling somebody Lord who is not Caesar was foolish for any Roman. It was treason for a centurion.

Coming to the Messiah of a people you've been oppressing could mean certain death. This is the savior of the people that you've been oppressing. To come to him would be dicey.

But in desperation, he places the weight of his life upon Jesus. What he wants more than the safety and the familiarity of his life and influence is for healing to come to his household. He's willing to be ousted by Caesar.

Willing to be rejected as a traitor. If it means salvation for his soul and healing for his home. Some of you know things about Jesus, but you are still carrying the weight of your life.

Still trying to save yourself. Still trying to fix yourself. Still trying to clean yourself up.

And listen, behavioral change may help you. Breaking destructive patterns in your life and building healthy rhythms is a good thing. But the only thing that can save you, the only thing that can heal you, the only thing that can carry the weight of your soul is Jesus.

To attach yourself to him like that bungee and jump. But it's risky. It's risky because you're already in with some crowd.

There is a crowd that you are on the inside of. And to turn to Jesus may bring consequences to your belonging in that crowd. Will you lose respect? Will you lose work? Will you get declined jobs because of your association with Jesus? Will you lose the reputation that you've built and enjoyed, the security that you've earned? Will you lose friends? Listen, if you do it right, you probably will.

If you do faith right, if you do loyalty to Jesus right, if you do allegiance to the kingdom of God over this world right, then the world will reject you just like they rejected Jesus. The world will try to spit you out. And this is the question that I'm sure the centurion wrestled with the question that we may be wrestling with today.

What do you want more? Do you wanna belong to the world? Or do you wanna belong to God? Because many people want the benefits of the kingdom without surrendering to the king. That's not the way it works. That's the warning.

That's the warning that Jesus gives because here's what's at stake. Jesus gives a terrifying picture for those who refuse to heed the warning. Outer darkness, weeping, gnashing of teeth.

Notice that Jesus' picture of hell here is not primarily flames. It's not fire and heat. It's not Satan

with a pitchfork.

It's outside. It's exclusion. It's separation.

Why weeping? Why is it a place of weeping? Because they were so close to the kingdom and they still missed it. How could I have let this slip through my fingers? How did I not see this in God's word? I was warned time and time again. I thought I was good.

Weeping. Why gnashing of teeth? Because they still believe that God is unjust for excluding them. See, hell is not just a place of suffering.

Sometimes it's not just a place for the most wicked people that we can think of. It is self-righteous separation. From the presence of God.

And listen, that warning is given to insiders. And so church, we need to take this seriously. Brothers and sisters, you need to take this seriously.

I need to take this seriously because if it is possible to be near Christianity and yet far from Christ, we need to take that seriously. Some believe that they're in because they were born to a Christian family, but your parents' faith can't save you. Your intellectual affirmations can't save you.

Some believe true things about Jesus, but have never actually submitted themselves to him as Lord. Some will point to church attendance and biblical knowledge and ministry involvement or a prayer that they prayed years ago as their evidence of being in, but they have never actually trusted Jesus to carry the weight of their souls. They know the songs and the theology and the culture and the arguments, but they don't have the humble faith that this enemy in the text had.

And so he is in and they are not. Listen, if that unsettles you, if you're disturbed by that, it may actually be evidence of the spirit of God working in your life. If that's concerning to you, Lord, I don't want to let it slip through my fingers.

Lord, I don't want to be the one gnashing my teeth at you because I believed that I was good enough. Lord, I want to trust you. I want to be in.

If you're unsettled right now, the temptation is going to be, the enemy is going to come in and say, God would never want you to feel uncomfortable. Ignore that. No, listen to me.

If you're feeling that sorrow, if you're feeling that longing right now, that's what you've got to listen to. Because Jesus doesn't give this warning in anger. He doesn't give this warning to push you away.

He gives you this warning to wake you up. He gives you this warning to call attention to the reality of this possibility. Because if this is all true, if it's possible to be near the kingdom and still miss

the King, if it's possible to know the scriptures and still refuse the one that the scriptures point to, if it's possible to spend your whole life assuming you belong while remaining outside, then we all need to take this seriously.

Because apart from Christ, listen, we are all outsiders. Every last one of us, apart from Jesus, we are all outsiders. Once we realize that the kingdom is not inherited through heritage or morality or theology or proximity or religious familiarity, we begin to realize that none of us naturally belong here.

Listen, if you're here, you're new. I know a couple of you are here and you're new. The temptation is to look around this room and say, these people belong and I'm different.

And that is a lie. None of us belong here. And if we have been invited in, and so are you.

And that makes the cross such good news because on the cross, Jesus, listen, the ultimate insider. Okay, if anyone's inside the kingdom, it is the King, the Lord of glory. On the cross though, this ultimate insider was treated like the ultimate outsider so that outsiders like us could be welcomed into the kingdom family through faith.

He traded places with you on the cross so that you could belong. He was cast out of the city. He was cast out of society.

He was crucified, which was reserved for only the most horrific criminals in Rome. Crucified so that we could have his life. The God who made the world was rejected by the world that he was made.

God was treated as an enemy, struck down and judged because of our sin so that his enemies could be welcomed in so that centurions could be made sons and daughters. And it was soldiers just like this man who later in the gospel would be the ones driving the nails through Jesus' hands and through his feet. And so think about that.

Enemies not coming to him in faith, enemies crucifying him. And in that moment, as they drove the nails through his hands, Jesus said, Father, forgive them for they know not what they do. Before they asked for forgiveness, before they understood it, before they believed, Jesus prayed for the forgiveness of his enemies.

That is the heart of our King. And church, if that is Christ's heart towards outsiders, if that is Christ's heart towards you, if you have been brought in because of his exclusion, then how can indifference be our heart to outsiders today? How can contempt be our heart toward outsiders today? How can we decide ahead of time that someone is too far gone for grace? You don't get to make that decision concerning yourself or concerning anybody else. Through faith, nobody is outside the saving power of God in Christ Jesus, our Lord, amen? And so today, right now, come to Jesus in faith.

Believe as the centurion did that he is Lord. Believe that he has authority over anything and everything that you could possibly encounter and trust him to do with your life what is good. And ultimately believe that on the cross, he already did.

He has already done with your life what he believed was good. See, through faith in Jesus, the Holy Spirit is given to us and we're united to Christ. The example that I like to use is like a marriage, right? When you get married, that which belonged to you before the marriage now belongs to the person you married.

And that which belonged to them before you got married now belongs to you after you got married. And so in this covenant of marriage, what belongs to the individual now belongs to one another. And so just like that, when we are united to Christ in covenant, that which belongs to us, our sin, now belongs to Jesus.

And he did with it exactly what he wanted to do. He nailed it to the cross. And when he died, it died with him.

And then it was buried into the grave. And three days later, he rose from the dead, leaving your sin and shame in the darkness of the grave, never to have claim on you again. But that's not all.

What belongs to him now belongs to you. The reason that you have eternal life when you put your faith in Jesus is because he is the risen one. He is the living one.

He is the one who made all things and breathed life into them. He is the one that defeated the grave. And so victory over the grave now belongs to you.

The reason that God can look at you and declare you righteous is not just because your sin is in the grave, but because you've been united to the righteous one through faith. And so Christ's righteousness belongs to you because you belong to him. The reason that you can have access to the father and intimacy with God is because you've been united to the one and only son of God through faith.

You don't come to Jesus and get stuff. You come to Jesus and you get Jesus and everything that belongs to Jesus. All of that belongs to those who were excluded from the kingdom because of our sin and yet are invited into the kingdom through faith because of Christ's work for us.

Put your faith in Jesus. Let him carry the weight of your life. And then having received that reconciliation to God, we are made ministers of that same grace and reconciliation.

We are now the people who go to the lost. As Jesus said, I will come. We now are the ones who say, where are those who need Christ? Where are those who need healing? Where are those who need love? Where are those who need belonging? Where are those who are rejected by society? Where are those who've been rejected by my family? Where are those who've been

rejected by the way that I've lived in the past? Now we are sent to them.

We have the same attitude of Christ who said, I will come. We say, we will come. We will serve.

We will love. Like Jesus, our response to suffering in this world is not withdrawal, but presence. We may not be able to heal, but we know the one who can.

Listen, how many people in our community remain outside of the experience of the kingdom of God because of insiders like us refusing to go to them? Many people say that they want the lost to be saved. Many people say that they want prodigals to come home. Many people say that they want outsiders to repent.

Let it be said of us that we're pursuing them. Not just by gathering here on Sundays, but going into our homes and families and relationships and friendships and places of business and parks and recreation and sports teams. Let it be said of the believers in Carpinteria that we go to the marginalized, that we go to the hurting, that we go to the broken, that we go to the sick, that we go to the suffering, that we know their names, that they've eaten at our tables.

Let it be said of us that there is a heart of prayer for forgiveness before we just pray for their repentance. Listen, as they crucified him, Jesus did not say, Father, give them repentance, for they know not what they do. He said, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.

That's the heart of the king towards outsiders. And if we belong to the king, that has to be our heart too. And so church, the only reason that we're seated at the table is because the true son was cast out for us.

The only reason that we're welcomed is because he was rejected in our place. We're not insiders by merit. We are enemies who became children by the grace of God.

And that grace changes everything. I'm gonna close with a quote from John Newton. May this be true of all of us.

I am not what I ought to be. I am not what I wish to be. But by the grace of God, I am not what I once was.

Amen. Let's pray. Father, would you speak now as you've been speaking through your word, by your spirit, would you continue to speak? And would your word bring healing? Would your word bring transformation? Would your word beckon those who are on the outside to draw near? Would your word remind us that those of us who are on the outside, Lord, that you have drawn near to us.

God, would you show us what it looks like to attach ourselves to you and jump, to put our faith in you and to allow you to carry the weight of our lives. Lord, we can't do it. We can't carry the weight of our lives.

We try and we fail because we were never meant to. You made us to depend on you. You made us to trust you.

You made us to receive what we need from you. And so, Lord, we just come to you as the one who has authority over our lives. And we say that we need you.

Would we experience you drawing near to us in that moment? Lord, heal, save, set free, forgive, pour out your spirit on this place and transform us. Don't just make us better versions of ourself. Make us new.

Make us like Jesus. Give us your heart. Now, as we worship, Holy Spirit, come and do this work in us in Jesus' name.

Amen.