

Topic 5: Healing of Centurion's servant
Verses: Matt 8:5-13; Luke 7:1-10; John 4:46-54
Chong Ho Yu (5-10-2015)

Differences between Gospels

	Matt	Luke	John
The petitioner	He was a centurion	He was a centurion	He was a royal official
The patient	He was the centurion's servant. He was paralyzed and suffered terribly.	He was the centurion's servant. He was very sick and about to die.	He was the son of the official and was close to death
Relationship between the petitioner and the patient	Not mentioned	The centurion valued the servant highly.	Not mentioned
How to approach Jesus	The centurion came to Jesus	The centurion sent some elders of Jews to see Jesus, and later sent his friends when Jesus was not far from his house.	The royal official came to Jesus
Way of petitioning	The centurion used the metaphor of authority to ask for a remote healing by words.	The friends of the centurion told Jesus about the metaphor of authority and asked for a remote healing.	The official asked Jesus to come to his son.
Jesus's response	Jesus was amazed by the faith of the centurion and said that he had not found such great faith in Israel. He went further to judge that some Israelites would be thrown outside the Kingdom of Heaven.	Jesus was amazed by the faith of the centurion and said that he had not found such great faith in Israel. But he didn't judge Israel.	Jesus criticized that people had to see signs and wonders, otherwise the people would never believe.
Jesus's healing	Matthew wrote that Jesus said to the Centurion, "Go! Let it be done just as you believed it would."	Jesus did not say anything about healing the servant.	John wrote that Jesus said, "Go, your son will live."
What happened to the sick	Matthew described the event in a bird-eye view. He knew that when Jesus talked to the centurion, the servant got well at the same moment.	Luke didn't write in a bird-view. He said that the men found the servant well later.	John also didn't write in a bird-view perspective. The official found that his son was healed later.
The petitioner	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	He and his household believed.

Social institution and patron/client relationship

In a resource-limited society people always face insurmountable adversaries. Thus, honorable persons are supposed to help the unfortunate or someone who is in a desperate situation. However, this relationship is asymmetrical. In other words, the patron who offers a favor and the client who receives help **are not socially equal**. In Luke, the centurion never met Jesus face to face. First he sent some elders

and then some friends. By today's social norm it is considered very impolite. However, it makes perfect sense at that time. The centurion said, "I do not deserve to have you (Jesus) come under my roof." He didn't consider himself being equal to Jesus and thus he avoided directly making a petition to Jesus.

Overall theme

Jesus's movement had expanded from the Jewish circle and the gentiles. In addition, the Jewish revolt against the Roman Empire had failed, and the church needed a theological explanation. Hence, the story of the centurion illustrates that even gentiles could have great faith, and those faithless Jews could be thrown outside the Kingdom of Heaven.

In Matthew and Luke, Jesus was amazed by the faith of the centurion. The logical ending should be that the centurion believed, but neither Matthew nor Luke said so. On the contrary, it seems that the royal official in John's account lacked faith, but he was converted at the end. Why?

In Matthew and Luke, the centurion's response to Jesus is viewed by Jesus to be an expression of faith, and faith leads to the miracle. In John, faith is a response to the miracle. The miracle is a "sign", which aims to evoke faith.

Focuses of Luke and Matthew:

Luke

It is important to point out that the Gospel of Luke is written for gentiles. In the book Luke set the stage and paved the way for the **gentile mission**, which is the theme of Acts (Strauss, 2007; Utley, 2004). Not surprisingly, Luke highly regarded the centurion, who is a gentile, in this story. In short, the focus of Luke is the gentiles.

Luke mentioned that the centurion built the synagogue, but it was omitted in Matthew. In the first century there was no social mobility. Both high-status and low-status persons were expected to live out and live up to their inherited roles and images. Honorable persons are expected to act as a patron to help out the lower class. The centurion might build the synagogue to fulfill his role as a patron. Gentiles who feared God and donated building funds to the Jews were well respected. Although the salary of centurion was much higher than that of low-ranking soldiers, this centurion still made a great sacrifice to build the synagogue in order to show a friendly gesture to his clients. In short, **the centurion and the Jewish people also had a patron-client relationship**. In Luke's account, this outsider to Israel was a friend of Jewish people. Thus, the boundary between Israel and the gentiles was blurred (Carroll, 2012). However, the centurion was considered an "unclean" gentile and therefore he could not invite a Jewish master to his home. Nevertheless, due to the **patron-client relationship between the centurion and the Jews, the elders were willing to make an exception** (Keener, 1993). In this case the Jewish elders played the role of intermediaries, offering mediation on behalf of the sick servant.

Matthew

On the other hand, the Gospel of Matthew was a Jewish Gospel. In the Matthew account the centurion talked to Jesus face-to-face to make a petition. **There were no intermediaries**. In this story the focus of Matthew is **the lost opportunity of the Jews**. In Verse 11 and 12 Jesus said their places will be taken, and this is not mentioned in Luke. Verse 11 portrays a typical Jewish perception of the future banquet in God's kingdom. Many Jews didn't care about their relationship with God. Rather, they accepted only a

racial, legalistic, and ritualistic religion handed down to them (Isa. 29:13). They were boastful and self-righteous (Matt. 3:9), and believed that the future feast was prepared for Israel only while they would be exalted over their enemies. People were seated at banquets according to rank. In the Jewish culture table fellowship implied intimacy, and therefore fellowship with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was perceived as a future hope exclusively for the Jewish, not for the Gentiles. However, Matthew turned it upside down by showing that the **so-called "rightful" heirs would be cast out** (Keener, 1993; Utle, 2000).

Discussion

The Jews had a false sense of security regarding their salvation. Do some Christians today still have this mentality? If so, what should be done?

What is the role of miracle in faith? Does faith lead to miracles or the other way around?

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