

GracePoint: A Weekly Sermon Discussion

16 – Jesus marvels

Announcements:

2/7 @6:30 -

Men's Group

2/9 @7:00 -

Corporate

Prayer

2/10 @6:30 -

Grace Group

2/13 @7:00 -

Sunday School

2/15 @6:30 -

Women's

Bible Study

ICE BREAKER: Has there been a time when you assumed something and were wrong? What was that like?

READ: Matthew 8:5-13

As I mentioned on Sunday, this narrative is filled with many great surprises. The fact that a ROMAN citizen would approach Jesus (a Jew) with respect and humility is shocking. Romans might make a Jewish citizen endure forced labor (see Matthew 5:41), but this is beyond the pale. But then, it gets more crazy. This is not some normal Roman, but a centurion -- a man with wealth, power, respect and dignity. There are few scenarios that would have a centurion come in such a posture. There is also just the miracle of Jesus healing, that's incredible! But to many who would hear this the greatest shock would not be any of the above things. The greatest shock would be what Jesus says about this man's faith, and then how he compares this Gentile to the self-proclaimed people of God.

Verse 10 tells us that Jesus "marvels" at the centurion's faith and then says: "with no one in Israel have I found such faith". Jesus is saying that in all the people he has dealt with, Jew or Gentile, no one has a faith greater than this man. Already this would be a slap in the face to many, but Jesus then doubles down on that thought. "Many will come from east and west and recline at the table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven". And it is this thought that bears some unpacking. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (who had his name changed to Israel) are commonly referred to as the patriarchs. It is through these that the blessings of God flow to the whole nation of Israel. These three men were the gold standard for God's favor and symbolic of all the promises God made to his people. So the shock here is then magnified. That ANY would come and recline with them is astounding, but that is compounded by the thought that it is MANY who are from the "east and west". It's almost as if this centurion is not the exception, but the beginning of a new rule. We could look at it as the new, global rule of God. Jesus is proclaiming a huge message to the whole world. The gospel healing that Jesus brings goes beyond any ethnic or national borders to people of every tribe, nation and tongue.

DISCUSS: In what ways should this message motivate us to share the Gospel to those around us? How should we interpret this "shocking" revelation of Jesus?

The hard teachings of Jesus do not stop there however. If it was not bad enough to hear that the table will be shared with Gentiles, the prospects for those who claimed to be in the kingdom just because of having Abraham as their father are not so good. "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.*" There are two angles to this: One is to see the great hope for those who come in faith. We get a palace at the table, there is hope and life and healing. There is room at the table for those who come to God in faith. The second is a warning against complacency. There were many who thought, because Abraham is my father, I am safe; or they assumed a certain bloodline or heritage gave them a particular favor with God. But neither of these things is true. We are saved, Paul tells us, by grace through faith. That is it. We can't assume we are in the kingdom because of who our parents are, or on the basis of something we muster up from within ourselves. The message of Jesus is clear here. Faith is what saves. Period.

DISCUSS: How do we rightly interpret the phrase "sons of the kingdom will be thrown into outer darkness?" In what ways might we need to hear this warning against complacency?