Matthew 8:5 When he had entered Capernaum, a centurion came forward to him, appealing to him,

capernaum.... In 4:13, we learned that Jesus left the village of his youth and moved to the city of Capernaum.

“And leaving Nazareth he went and lived in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali,” (Matthew 4:13, ESV)

This fact may explain the confidence of the centurion in Jesus. Rome was an occupying army in Galilee, and thereby in this city of Capernaum. This centurion was its local representative and commanding officer. At his immediate command were some 80 to 100 soldiers ready to carry out his orders with absolute faithfulness to every detail.

Probably little missed the attention of the one who was responsible for the peace of this city. As such the teaching and miracles of Jesus were no doubt observed first hand, originally simply as a necessity of his administrative responsibility. But this careful observation soon matured into faith.

Matthew 8:6 “Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, suffering terribly.”

1 παραλυτικός “...the nervous affliction variously known as paralysis or palsy, the latter denoting loss of motor power in a muscle or set of muscles and being equivalent to motor paralysis.” Spiros Zodhiates, The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000).
Luke provides greater detail here saying: “When the centurion heard about Jesus, he sent to him elders of the Jews, asking him to come and heal his servant.” (Luke 7:3, ESV) This man approached Jesus through “elders of the Jews” and through “friends” Luke 7:6, demonstrating a considerable humility.

**Matthew 8:7** And he said to him, “I will come and heal him.” or [Shall I come and heal him?]

*he said to him*…. Initially elders and friends were intermediaries, but eventually Jesus does stand before the man and speaks to him.

This statement is actually a question: “Shall I [ἐγώ, emphatic; i.e., I, a Jew] come and heal him?” Or, “You want me to come and heal him?” …. commentators generally recognize that both the wording and the flow of the dialogue require that it be construed as a question…. Although most translation continue translating the verse as a statement, the NIV does otherwise, recognizing that it is a question. “Jesus said to him, “Shall I come and heal him?”” (Matthew 8:7, NIV)

Jesus’ response is a racial rebuff. “Being a Jew, I don’t associate with people like you. Do you really think that someone like me would come to your house, the house of a Gentile dog?” Jesus response is an insult as it was to the Canaanite woman “It is not right to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs” (Matthew 15:21-28). But in both cases, it is actually designed to elicit a faith response.

“The centurion’s remarkable reply follows naturally from such a probing question: “Of course not; I couldn’t expect you to come under my roof; all I am asking for is a word of healing, spoken here where you are.” The Centurion would not be so insensitive as to ask Jesus to enter into a Gentile home.

We are here reminded of the request by the Canaanite woman and Jesus' rebuff of her request for healing as is demonstrated here as well.

*“He answered, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”’* (Matthew 15:24, ESV)

“The two Gentile-stories follow the same line of development: request met by a racial rebuff, which in turn provokes a remarkable declaration of faith in the light of which Jesus’ apparent reluctance is overcome and the Gentile is restored.” In both cases, “When he finds such faith in a Gentile, the logic of excluding such a one from help on the basis of Jesus’ exclusive call to go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (15:24) loses its cogency.”

Take note also that in either case, a question or a statement, there is no question in Jesus’ mind that he can and will heal him.

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Matthew 8:8 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.

Lord…. The centurion’s use of the word Lord is interesting. His use of the word might correspond to something like “Sir” in our day. But his position in life would not incline him to talk to conquered and thereby inferior people with such deference. But for him, “…here is a ‘Lord’ with authority analogous to his own, but operating in quite another league.”⁷ Instead of looking down on this itinerate Rabbi, he looks up. Arrogance is a rather common quality of people with power and weapons. But this man dares not use such tones with this Rabbi. He has come to realize that there is something very unique, something elevating about him. Instead of strutting and ordering, he comes, hat in hand, begging.

I am not worthy⁸…. It is somewhat amazing to hear this centurion say this. Under normal circumstance he would view himself as the superior of these conquered people. He issues orders, they take them. He issues orders, they take them; he is worthy, they are unworthy. Deference, respect, honor, all these and more he expects from these Jews. How did it happen that he nows considers himself the one who is unworthy?

I am not worthy to have you come under my roof…. Jews did not enter the home of Gentiles; “the only time in the whole gospel (or indeed in any of the gospels) when he will enter a Gentile building is when he has no choice in the governor’s headquarters in Jerusalem at his trial.”⁹ Even after the resurrection, Peter was still reluctant to enter Cornelius’s house—another centurion. “And he said to them, “You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation…” (Acts 10:28–29, ESV).

There is no question that this attitude toward Gentiles was considered an insult, and in fact, by the average Jew it was intended to be just that. Clearly, Jews thought themselves better than everyone else and this centurion certainly knew that. Yet it is the centurion who evaluates himself as unworthy. There is something going on in this man’s heart. He sees something in Jesus that is so much greater than what he sees in himself that he agrees with the traditional insult.

only say the word…. In the world of the centurion, when “he says so, things happen; to have his will performed the centurion does not need to do anything directly himself. And this is how the centurion also considers the situation to be with Jesus; but in Jesus’ case the word of command can lead to results quite outside the frame of any human authority structure, where authority reaches only as far as the resources one is able to command.”¹⁰ The centurion realizes that Jesus is able to command resources that he cannot begin to command or even understand. The phrase “only say the word” is a staggering act of faith.

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⁸ worthy ἱκανός Pertaining to “meeting a standard, fit, appropriate, competent, qualified, able, w. the connotation worthy, good enough…” William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 472.
Matthew 8:9 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.”

under authority…. This is the second use of authority so far in Matthew. (Matthew 7:29, ESV, Matthew 8:9, ESV. These will follow: Matthew 9:6, ESV, Matthew 9:8, ESV. Matthew 10:1, ESV).

The centurion identifies himself as a man of authority able to order men to serve. “A military man recognizes “authority” when he sees it. The centurion has both superiors and inferiors in the military hierarchy; he both receives and issues orders, and orders are expected to be obeyed.”11 In Jesus, he sees something comparable but far more elevated. “The orders which he issues at the human level are compared with those he expects Jesus to issue at the spiritual level, and he sees no reason why physical disability should resist Jesus’ authority any more than his own subordinates resist his. His is the no-nonsense faith of a practical man.”12 He believes that Jesus can order the unseen forces of the world—and they must obey him!

Matthew 8:10 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.

marveled13 Could Jesus marvel? “Wonder cannot apply to God, for it arises out of what is new and unexpected: but it might exist in Christ, for he had clothed himself with our flesh, and with human affections.”14 Under his current human state, he could and did marvel.

It is always others who marvel at Jesus, but here Jesus marvels at the faith of this man. Such faith was expected of Israel, “…it is among God’s historical people that faith should most naturally be found”15 but it did not much appear in Israel, instead “…he marveled because of their unbelief.” (Mark 6:6, ESV).

no one in Israel…. This is the kind of statement that would sit badly with his fellow countrymen. Jesus recently said something like this in Nazareth and that nearly got him killed.

“But in truth, I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heavens were shut up three years and six months, and a great famine came over all the land, and Elijah was sent to none of them but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian.” (Luke 4:25–27, ESV)

Jews, being superior to Gentiles, would look with astonishment and anger at Jesus' suggestion that Gentiles had a faith superior to their own.

faith\textsuperscript{16}.... But this faith was not expected of those outside this elect community, Israel, but here it was!

“The greatness of his faith did not rest in the mere fact that he believed Jesus could heal from a distance but in the degree to which he had penetrated the secret of Jesus’ authority. That faith was the more surprising since the centurion was a Gentile and lacked the heritage of OT revelation to help him understand Jesus. But this Gentile penetrated more deeply into the nature of Jesus’ person and authority than any Jew of his time.”\textsuperscript{17}

We are reminded of another centurion, Cornelius, in another town, Caesarea, that would one day exercise a similar faith (Acts 10). Matthew is quick to point out the faith of gentiles from the genealogy of Jesus in chapter 1 to the Great Commission in chapter 28. In this way, he is anticipating the spread of the gospel into the whole world.

Covenant Sanctions for Unbelief

\textit{Matthew 8:11} I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven,

\textit{many will come from east and west}.... Several Old Testament authors make reference to the nations or gentiles participating in the eternal blessing of God.

“Let not the foreigner who has joined himself to the \textsc{LORD} say, “The \textsc{LORD} will surely separate me from his people”; and let not the eunuch say, “Behold, I am a dry tree.” For thus says the \textsc{LORD}: “To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose the things that please me and hold fast my covenant, I will give in my house and within my walls a monument and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off. “And the foreigners who join themselves to the \textsc{LORD}, to minister to him, to love the name of the \textsc{LORD}, and to be his servants, everyone who keeps the Sabbath and does not profane it, and holds fast my covenant— these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.” The Lord \textsc{GOD}, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, declares, “I will gather yet others to him besides those already gathered.”” (Isaiah 56:3–8, ESV)

“\textit{And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising. Lift up your eyes all around, and see; they all gather together, they come to you; your sons shall come from afar, and your daughters shall be carried on the hip.}” (Isaiah 60:3–4, ESV)


“O LORD, my strength and my stronghold, my refuge in the day of trouble, to you shall the nations come from the ends of the earth and say: “Our fathers have inherited nothing but lies, worthless things in which there is no profit.” (Jeremiah 16:19, ESV)

“For from the rising of the sun to its setting my name will be great among the nations, and in every place incense will be offered to my name, and a pure offering. For my name will be great among the nations, says the L ORD of hosts.” (Malachi 1:11, ESV)

“After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands,” (Revelation 7:9, ESV)

recline at table…. This is an allusion to the eschatological banquet spoken of by Isaiah.

“On this mountain the L ORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined. And he will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the L ORD has spoken.” (Isaiah 25:6–8, ESV)

the kingdom of heaven…. We should note the broadened use of the term “kingdom of heaven”. “While the term in Matthew normally refers to the situation on earth where God’s people live under his sovereignty, there is an important strand of usage in which “entering the kingdom of heaven” functions as a term for ultimate salvation (5:20; 7:21; 18:3; 19:23–24; 21:31), and in 13:41, 43 the kingdom of the Son of Man and of the Father denotes the state of final blessedness from which the wicked are excluded and in which the righteous shine.”18

Matthew 8:12 while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

the sons of the kingdom…. Here he refers to Jews. “The expression “subjects of the kingdom” (lit., “sons of the kingdom”) is a Semitism pointing to national Israel, whose leaders took exclusive claim to God’s kingdom through their Abrahamic heritage (3:8–9).”19 This would be a startling statement. The thought that Jews could be cast out to damnation and unclean gentiles enjoy the eternal blessing of the Fathers would enrage the Jews, especially the spiritual leaders of the nation. They viewed salvation as a natural outcome of their race. Others, except for special circumstances, not being Jews, were lost. But here Jesus makes it clear that “we are to think of a reconstitution of the true people of God which is no longer on the basis of racial ancestry, but, as symbolized by the Gentile centurion, on the basis of faith in Jesus.”20 God’s chosen

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19 Michael J. Wilkins, Matthew (The NIV Application Commentary; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2004), 343.
people are no longer sons by race, but are now sons by grace. God’s chosen people are the Church of Jesus Christ.

*Thrown (out)*…. “‘Thrown out’ suggests violent exclusion at the time when entrance is sought….”

outer darkness…. “Outer darkness plainly signified damnation….” It is a picture Jesus uses on several occasions to imply a most horrible consequence.

And to make it even worse, “…the punishment of the wicked is increased by their being able to see the bliss of the righteous, and the phrase “darkness outside” may be intended to picture the bright lights of the banquet visible to those who are excluded (cf “you will see” in the parallel to this saying, Luke 13:28).”

“In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God but you yourselves cast out.” (Luke 13:28, ESV)

**weeping and gnashing of teeth….** Weeping expresses their great sorrow at the eternal outcome of their lives. The gnashing of teeth expresses their eternal and enraged hatred for the One that sent them there (Psalm 112:10).

This last sentence is of importance. Many have suggested that the punishment of the lost in hell in extending for a long but limited period of time, would be adequate punishment for their life of sin. And that actually makes sense. What they are missing however is that sinners never cease to sin, even in hell. As a result, their sin never ceasing and therefore, their punishment never ceases either.

“Then the king said to the attendants, ‘Bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’” (Matthew 22:13, ESV)

“And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” (Matthew 25:30, ESV)

**Matthew 8:13** 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.

**as you have believed….** Jesus’ answer to the Canaanite woman is very similar to this one. Without actually going to the woman’s house either, but with a word the child is

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22 ἐξώτερος σκότος “...a place or region which is both dark and removed (presumably from the abode of the righteous) and serving as the abode of evil spirits and devils—‘outer darkness, darkness outside.’” Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 6.


healed. “The close similarity of this verse to 15:28 further underlines the links between these two accounts of Jesus’ response to a Gentile request.”

“The close similarity of this verse to 15:28 further underlines the links between these two accounts of Jesus’ response to a Gentile request.”

“Then Jesus answered her, “O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire.” And her daughter was healed instantly.” (Matthew 15:28, ESV)

“The actual healing is not in proportion to the amount of the centurion’s faith…nor is the healing caused by the centurion’s faith…but it is in response to his faith in Jesus as the One who can heal.”

26 Michael J. Wilkins, Matthew (The NIV Application Commentary; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2004), 343.