

Yeshua Heals a Gentile

To Be Like Yeshua Means to Serve Others

In my last post, we began a new mini-series from the Christian Torah to examine what it is to be like Yeshua. We learned that He was willing to become ceremonial unclean by touching and healing a M'tsora. In this post, we will learn that He even had compassion on a servant of a Roman Centurion. We pick up the story in Matthew 8:5.

"As Yeshua entered K'far-Nachum, a Roman army officer came up and pleaded for help. 'Sir, my orderly is lying at home paralyzed and suffering terribly!' Yeshua said, 'I will go and heal Him.' But the officer answered, 'Sir, I am unfit to have you come into my home. Rather, if you will only give the command, my orderly will recover. For I too am a man under authority I have soldiers under me, and I say to this one, 'Go!' and he goes; to another, 'Come!' and he comes; to my slave, 'Do this!' and he does it.' On hearing this Yeshua was amazed and said to the people following Him. 'Yes! I tell you, have not found anyone in Isra'el with such trust! Moreover, I tell you that many will come from the east and from the west to take their places at the feast in the Kingdom of Heaven with Avraham, Yitz'chak and Ya'akov. But those born for the Kingdom will be thrown outside in the dark, where people will wail and grind their teeth!' Then Yeshua said to the officer, 'Go; let it be for you as you have trusted.' And his orderly was healed at that very moment." ~ Matthew 8:5-13

This miracle occurred to a person who, because of his race and occupation, was not close to the Jewish faith. However, in this story and the previous one (the healing of the m'tsoraim), Yeshua willingly dealt with people the Jews shunned.

K'far-Nachum (Capernaum), located on the northwestern shore of the Sea of Galilee, was the largest of the many fishing towns surrounding the lake. Yeshua had recently moved to K'far-Nachum from Nazareth (4:12-13). K'far-Nachum was a thriving town with great wealth as well as great sin and decadence. Near a major trade route, it housed a contingent of Roman soldiers even though Galilee was not under Roman occupation until after the death of Herod Agrippa in 44 CE. Because K'far-Nachum had the headquarters for Roman troops, the city was filled with heathen influences from all over the Roman Empire. This was a needy place for Yeshua to challenge both Jews and non-Jews with the gospel of God's kingdom.

A *centurion* - a career military officer in the Roman army - had control over one hundred soldiers. Often the sons of Roman senators or powerful figures would begin their careers at this level. The Jews hated Roman soldiers for their oppression, control, and ridicule and considered them "unclean" because they were despised Gentiles.

The centurion asked Yeshua for help, not for Himself but for someone else. He crossed racial, social, and political barriers to present his servant's plight. But he didn't tell Yeshua what he wanted. He simply described his servant's condition: paralyzed and in excruciating pain. He allowed Yeshua to decide if and how he would help. The centurion practiced wisdom in what he did and what he didn't do.

God honors us with the gift of prayer. This privilege does not give us permission to make demands but freedom to express our needs, gratitude, and praise. We need to use the centurion as a model for our prayer, and pray for those beyond your immediate circle of relatives and friends. Such praying will not only bring God's resources to bear on that person's life; it also will greatly help to deepen your own compassion.

This Roman centurion was apparently different from many other Roman soldiers who despised the Jews. He may have been a "God-fearer" who worshiped the God of Israel but was not circumcised (see Acts 2:5; 10:2). This centurion had apparently heard about Yeshua's healing powers. He may have known about the healing of the Roman official's son (which probably occurred earlier, see John 4:46-54). He knew that Yeshua had the power to heal. While this soldier's concern about his orderly may seem unusual, the Jewish historian Josephus

wrote that Roman soldiers had many servants who actually trained and fought with them. So this servant may have been the centurion's personal attendant with whom he felt a close bond. The centurion, a military authority, addressed Yeshua as *Lord*. This Roman officer showed respect for Yeshua's authority in this area of healing (see also 8:2).

The Roman centurion may have been surprised at Yeshua's quick and willing response. Yet this was the same loving person who reached out and touched the m'tsora. He would not hesitate to go to a Gentile's home to heal a sick servant. The Gospels never record an incident of Jews entering a Gentile home. Jews generally did not do so because it made them ceremonially "unclean." However, as Yeshua willingly touched the m'tsora to heal Him, so Yeshua would willingly enter a Gentile home if needed. For Yeshua, doing good always transcended both Levitical regulations and Shabbat traditions.

The centurion surely knew of the Jewish insistence upon not entering Gentile homes, so he protested Yeshua's willingness to go right away to see the servant. Luke 7:7 seems to show that he was thinking more of his own moral unworthiness. He saw that Yeshua's authority was greater than his own and that Yeshua need not personally visit his home. The centurion understood that Yeshua need *only speak the word* to heal the servant. He understood the power of Yeshua's words. Because of his position, the centurion could delegate responsibility with a word and know that the job would be done.

He Himself was *a man under authority* because final authority rested with the Roman emperor. The emperor delegated responsibility to various officials, such as this centurion. Thus, when the centurion gave orders to soldiers under Him, he spoke with the authority of the emperor. The centurion was accustomed both to obeying and to being obeyed.

It is worth noting that only those who are *under authority* have the right to *exercise authority*. He may have applied his understanding of military orders to Yeshua - realizing that Yeshua's power and authority came from God. When Yeshua spoke, God spoke. Yeshua did not need rituals or medicines or even His touch or presence to accomplish a healing. Whatever he understood, the centurion had absolutely no doubt that Yeshua could merely speak the word and heal the orderly.

This man's genuine faith **amazed** Yeshua. He said to those gathered around Him that he had not found **such great trust in anyone in Israel**. In other words, this Gentile's faith put to shame the stagnant piety that had blinded many of the Jewish religious leaders. Without the benefit of growing up to memorize the Old Testament Scriptures and to learn from esteemed Jewish leaders, this Gentile had understood the need to depend totally on Yeshua's power. He knew, without a doubt, that Yeshua could do what seemed impossible. Such faith both astonished and pleased Yeshua.

The centurion knew how the chain of command worked. He correctly concluded that the same laws applied to spiritual power. The greater Yeshua's authority, the less necessary His physical presence to accomplish His will. Yeshua's words indicated much more than His authority; they revealed His concern.

Is our faith able to overcome our hesitation and doubt? Are we willing to act upon His words? If we appreciate His power and love, we need to give Him our full service and obedience.

Verses 11 & 12 almost seem like parenthetical statements of Yeshua in this recitation of His healing grace. But they provide a great background for what He says to the Roman army officer in verse 13. Most Jews looked forward to the day when the *diaspora* Jews would return to Jerusalem - from the east and the west - to enjoy the company of the Messiah and the patriarchs in a great banquet (Psalm 107:3; Isaiah 25:6; 43:5-6). The prophet Yesha'yahu predicted that some Gentiles would also return to witness this great event and to partake of it vicariously (Isaiah 2:2-3). But Yeshua speaks of the Gentiles' direct participation, for the *many* that **will come from the east and from the west** are the Gentiles who will come to believe in Yeshua. These Gentiles **will take their places at the feast**.

Few Jews understood, however, that Gentiles would also take their places at the feast with the patriarchs of the Jewish nation – *Avraham, Yitz’chak and Ya’akov*. A Jew who would sit at a table with a Gentile would become defiled. Yet, Yeshua pictured the patriarchs themselves sitting down with Gentiles at the great feast. No wonder Yeshua’s teachings caused such a stir among the religious leaders of the day! In addition, Yeshua explained that while many Jews believed that their lineage in the Jewish race assured their reservations at the banquet, this simply was not the case (see also John the Baptist’s words in 3:7-10). In fact, unbelieving *born for the Kingdom* (referring to Jews), instead of having assured seats at the banquet, would find themselves *thrown outside, into the darkness*. The point is that the central focus of God’s kingdom will not be only the Jewish race. Some Jews will *not* be included. Many religious Jews who should be in the kingdom will be excluded, however, because of their lack of faith. Entrenched in their religious traditions, they could not accept Yeshua or His new message. We must be careful not to become so set in our religious habits that we expect God to work only in specific ways. This is the very reason that we are called to share the Gospel to the Jew first; and then the Gentile! Remember that Yeshua says that He ***"is the way."*** In fact, He is the ONLY way!

Each individual has to choose to accept or reject the Gospel, and no one can become part of God’s kingdom on the basis of heritage or connections. Coming from a Christian family or a devoutly, religious Jewish family is a wonderful blessing, but it won’t guarantee our eternal life. Each person must believe in and follow Yeshua themselves.

In these two verses, Matthew directed his Jewish readers to two truths:

- Yeshua fulfilled all the foretold descriptions of the Messiah, and
- Yeshua was the Savior of the entire world, not just the Jews.

The first truth defines Yeshua’s identity as Messiah; the second truth defines His relationship to us. The first states a fact; the second offers a personal invitation to us.

Will we be among the varied multitudes celebrating with the Patriarchs in the triumph of Yeshua? If you have any doubt at all about your seat at the table, I would be glad to talk with you. Just send me your phone number at <mailto:dnorris@norrisassociates.com>.

In my next post, we will explore the third healing of a second-class citizen.