

How to Marvel the Marvelous One

Introduction

The Text

¹After he had finished all his sayings in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum. ²Now a centurion had a servant who was sick and at the point of death, who was highly valued by him. ³When the centurion heard about Jesus, he sent to him elders of the Jews, asking him to come and heal his servant. ⁴And when they came to Jesus, they pleaded with him earnestly, saying, "He is worthy to have you do this for him, ⁵for he loves our nation, and he is the one who built us our synagogue." ⁶And Jesus went with them. When he was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends, saying to him, "Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof. ⁷Therefore I did not presume to come to you. But say the word, and let my servant be healed. ⁸For I too am a man set 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." ⁹When Jesus heard these things, he marveled at him, and turning to the crowd that followed him, said, "I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith." ¹⁰And when those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the servant well. (Luke 7:1–10)

A Staggering Observation

- A. The title of today's sermon is: "How to Marvel the Marvelous One." I think tucked away there in v. 9 is the main point of this story: "He marveled at him." We are meant to be a bit staggered by this.
- B. When we read the gospels, we grow used to the idea of people marveling at Jesus. He, after all, is the Marvelous One.
 1. In [Luke 4:22](#), Jesus preaches in the synagogue there in Nazareth and we read that: "all spoke well of him and marveled at the gracious words that were coming from his mouth."
 2. In [Luke 8:25](#), Jesus is in a boat with His disciples when a storm hits. They start taking on water and the disciples think they are perishing. But Jesus rebukes the wind and the waves with a word, and we read: "[The disciples] were afraid, and they marveled, saying to one another, 'Who then is this, that he commands even winds and water, and they obey him?'"
 3. And then in [Luke 24:12](#), after Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection, the women approach the tomb only to find that the stone had been rolled away, and Jesus was gone. They rush back and tell the apostles and then, Peter, we're told: "rose and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; and he went home marveling at what had happened."
 - a. And we could keep doing this all day. Because Jesus is the Marvelous One. People are marveling at Him everywhere He goes.

C. But rare on the pages of the gospels is Jesus Himself ever said to marvel. Indeed, this is the only time He is said to do so (at least in a positive sense).

1. Again, we are meant to be staggered by this. We are meant to ask: “How? How did this man, this Centurion, cause Jesus to marvel at him?”

a. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, He knows the end from the beginning, He is God, and yet, here in our text He marvels at this man?! How?!

D. This morning, as we try to answer this question and uncover how we too can cause the Marvelous One to marvel, we will divide our text into two parts: (1) A Moment of Crisis (vv. 1-5); and (2) A Marvelous Faith (vv. 6-10).

(1) A Moment of Crisis (vv. 1-5)

Setting the Stage

A. Vv. 1-5 set the stage for vv. 6-10. It’s a moment of crisis that provides the opportunity for this Centurion to marvel the Son of God. So we have to do a little background work here.

B. The first thing we must point out is that this man who causes the Son of God to marvel, isn’t even a Jew. He’s a “Centurion”, a Roman soldier—probably of Roman ethnicity, certainly a Gentile (v. 9).

1. And, therefore, he’s quite a surprising individual to be honored as the only man in the New Testament to cause Jesus to marvel. We would expect such an honor to go to a Jew, a scribe, a Pharisee, one of Jesus’ disciples. But no. It goes to a Gentile.

a. Here we have a not-so-subtle foreshadowing of the direction in which Jesus’ gospel ministry is headed, where upon His death and resurrection, the doors of the kingdom will be flung open wide and it’s the Gentiles who will come streaming in!

C. We should note that a Centurion, as a principal officer in the Roman army, would have about a hundred men under his command and would himself be under higher officers and, ultimately, under Herod Antipas.

D. From my research, it seems that soldiers in general and Centurions in particular were not permitted to marry during their service in the Roman army.

1. This perhaps explains the unique affection and affinity this man has for his servant. Even some of the Greek words used here seem to indicate that his servant had become something like a son to him.

a. And this servant is “sick and at the point of death” (v. 2).

E. And then in v. 3, this Centurion, we’re told, “heard about Jesus”.

1. Immediately I thought of Rom 10:14: “How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard?”
 - a. And I thought of the neighborhoods—around our church, around our Home Groups, around each of our members’ homes, around my home. These are places where, as disciples of Christ, salt among the dying, light in the darkness, ambassadors of the kingdom, a royal priesthood, calling people back to God through Jesus.
 - i. We want them to hear about Jesus from us, so that they too might believe and call on Him in their time of crisis . . . like this Centurion does.
- F. He sends forth this call through “the elders of the Jews” who plead on his behalf earnestly we are told: “⁴ saying, “He is worthy to have you do this for him, ⁵ for he loves our nation, and he is the one who built us our synagogue” (vv. 4-5).
 1. “He’s been a great help to us. He deserves our help in return.”

(2) A Marvelous Faith (vv. 6-10)

- A. The central concern of this section is again found there in v. 9: “[Jesus] marveled at him . . .”
 1. And now we are approaching the answer to the question we asked back at the beginning: How?! Why?! What causes the Marvelous One to marvel?!
 - a. Well, Jesus lays it out quite plainly for us. The answer is found there at the end of v. 9: “I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith.”
 - i. It’s this Centurion’s faith that causes Jesus to marvel.
- B. We can unfold this further. A marvelous faith, it seems from this text, has two key characteristics: (1) It is Self-Humbling; and (2) It is Christ-Exalting. Let’s take these one at a time.

(1) Self-Humbling: “I Am Not Worthy”

- A. Jesus was persuaded by the elders to help and, in v. 6 we read that He is traveling with them towards this Centurion’s house. But something curious happens at this point.
 1. While the Centurion had initially sent the elders of the Jews to ask Jesus to come, it seems he is now having second thoughts. He has this growing sense of his own inadequacy and unworthiness. Who is he that this holy Man of God should come into his home?
- B. So he dispatches now a second group, a group of his own friends, to bring a message from him to Jesus. And this is what he has them say: ^{6b} “Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof. ^{7a} Therefore I did not presume [count myself worthy] to come to you” (vv. 6b-7a).

1. Interestingly, with this statement he effectively undoes what the elders based their whole plea on back up in v. 4: “He is worthy to have you do this for him.” “Look at all he’s done for us.”
 - a. But the Centurion himself is not nearly as impressed with who he is or what he’s accomplished. He’s impressed with Jesus.
 - i. So he begins his message with self-humbling.
- C. Let me ask: When’s the last time you felt unworthy to be in God’s presence? It’s not bad to feel that way. It’s actually quite critical that we do.
 1. Sinners belong in the hands of an angry God, not in the hands of a Father who loves them, cares for them, provides for them. Wow! How did that happen?! What in the world are we doing here?!

(2) Christ-Exalting: “Say the Word”

- A. So this Centurion begins his message with self-humbling. But he doesn’t stop there. Even though he has such a strong sense of his own unworthiness, he has an even stronger sense of Christ’s willingness and capacity to help.
- B. He turns from humbling himself to exalting Christ: “^{7b} [S]ay the word, and let my servant be healed.⁸ For I too am a man set 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” (vv. 7b-8).
 1. He draws a stunning analogy here between his experience as a Centurion and Jesus’ experience as a messenger/prophet/instrument of God.
 - a. As a Centurion, he is a man under the authority of Rome. Yet he’s also been given authority over a hundred or so soldiers. And these soldiers do what he commands.
 - b. And He says: “That’s kind of like You, right Jesus? Only your authority spans way beyond mine, way beyond Herod’s, way beyond Caesar’s. For you are under the authority of YHWH, and yet it is plain that He has given You authority over all His creation. And whatsoever you command in this world, it is done!”
- C. And that is the remarkable point. While the Centurion can command a few men, he knows that Jesus can command the seen and unseen world.
 1. The Centurion knows that Jesus has such authority over all things, that all He must do is speak a word and death itself will release its grip, sickness will abandon ship, straying molecules will fall in line, and his beloved servant will be healed.
- D. This is the sort of thing the author of Hebrews has in mind when he writes of Jesus: “[He] upholds all things by the word of His power” (Heb 1:3).

1. “You don’t have to trouble yourself by coming into my house. You just have to say the word and the universe obeys.”
- E. So, in these words, Jesus perceives this man’s faith—both self-humbling and Christ-exalting—and He marvels.

Jesus Marvels at Those Who Marvel at Him

- A. We should stop here and consider for a moment the wonder of what we just witnessed. We need to see how contrary to our native intuitions this all really is.
1. Before reading this, how do you think you would have answered the question: What would cause God to marvel at you?
- B. Don’t we immediately think of something we must do?
1. If I sold all my things and went to the 10/40 window as a missionary, then maybe He would marvel at me.
 2. Or if I finally kicked that sin that I’ve been struggling with for the last decade, then maybe He would marvel at me.
 3. Or if quit being such a coward and started evangelizing my neighbors, then maybe He would marvel at me.
 - a. But as it is I’m just an ordinary Christian—up and down, hot and cold. Nothing to marvel at here.
- C. But we get it all backwards. Jesus doesn’t marvel at us for what we accomplish. He marvels at us when we finally give up on what we can accomplish and embrace what He is able to accomplish; when we stop trying to impress Him and we start being impressed by Him.
1. Perhaps a memorable way to sum all this up would be: Jesus marvels at those who marvel at Him.
- D. And such is the consistent testimony of Scripture:
1. Consider [Psa 147:10-11](#): “¹⁰ His delight is not in the strength of the horse, nor his pleasure in the legs of a man, ¹¹ but the Lord takes pleasure in those who fear him, in those who hope in his steadfast love.”
 2. Or [Isa 66:2](#): “But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word.”
 3. Or, in [Matt 15:21-28](#), Matthew records a story quite similar to the one in our text. A Canaanite woman, a Gentile, has a demon-oppressed daughter. And she’s crying out to Jesus for help. The disciples want Him to send her away. But Jesus, testing her faith, says to her: “²⁶ ‘It is not right to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs.’”²⁷ She said, ‘Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.’ [Meaning: “I know I am not worthy, but I know You are gracious and sovereign!”]²⁸ Then Jesus answered

her, 'O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire.' And her daughter was healed instantly" (vv. 26-28).

E. Jesus doesn't marvel at the marvelous. He marvels at those who marvel at Him—at those who turn away from self-reliance and fasten all their hope to God!

1. In a fallen, self-exalting, God-belittling world like ours, that's something to marvel at!

Our Own Moments of Crisis

A. So how are we doing with this? When our own moments of crisis strike, how do we respond?

B. It seems to me we, again, often get things backwards. In moments of crisis, when we ought to be getting smaller and Christ getting bigger, often it is the other way around.

1. Often we bend inwards, we start fending for ourselves, relying on ourselves, scrambling to come up with a solution. We respond with a whole host of things: anger, bitterness, aggression, anxiety, panic, depression, etc.

a. But, however we respond, one thing is true: We get bigger and God all but shrinks from view.

C. Now our moments of crisis don't have to be near death experiences. Truly, we face crises of faith every day, in the ordinary stuff of life.

D. I can give you one way this plays out for me sometimes. Being a pastor is not always easy. There's a real diversity to the work, especially in a smaller church—administration, counseling, discipleship, raising up leaders, overseeing leaders, event planning, leading meetings, leading musical worship, networking with other pastors, evangelism and missions, not to mention preaching week in and week out.

1. Now, don't mishear, I love all of this, and I count it such a privilege from God that I get to participate in such work, but, as a young pastor with a young family, needless to say, sometimes I get tired. I get tired of being the guy doing so much of the talking. I get tired of leading the charge. I feel insufficient.

E. What do I do with that? Try to buck up, be a man, and roll on in my own strength? No. I want to do what this Centurion does, what Paul the Apostle does when considering his own ministry:

1. In [2 Cor 2:16](#), Paul cries out: "Who is sufficient for these things?" His implication is clear: No one is sufficient in himself to be a minister of the gospel on behalf of God. No one!

2. But He doesn't stop with humbling himself. He goes on later in [3:5-6](#) to exalt Christ who makes Him sufficient: "⁵[W]e are [not] sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God,⁶ who has made us sufficient to be ministers . . ."

a. "I can't do it. But Jesus, You can. Just say the word!"

- F. I know each one of us faces our own onslaught of daily crises.
 - 1. Maybe it's your calling as a mom. You've got mommy guilt, feeling like you're blowing it at every turn.
 - 2. Maybe it's your work, where your boss is driving you hard and you're in here even now just dreading the start of a new week tomorrow.
 - 3. Maybe it's your health, and the nagging pain or the unknowns of it all.
 - a. Whatever it is, these crises we face, provide profound opportunities to marvel the Son of God, as we let ourselves get small and place our faith in a really big God.

A Portrait of the Last Day

- A. Our text ends with a note of triumph: *“And when those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the servant well”* (v. 10).
- B. Always, in Christ's healings, we find portraits of what He will do for us ultimately on the last day—what He will accomplish for us in His life, death, resurrection, and ongoing intercession.
 - 1. The healing that will come for you and I, in the end, will not be momentary, but eternal.
- C. Sickness and death are not natural. They are intruders. They are not supposed to be here. But we let them in: *“. . .in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die”* (Gen 2:17).
 - 1. They are with us now as curses, as consequences, for our evil, for our stiff-arming of God and His ways.
- D. And Christ has come to reverse this. To banish these intruders we let loose on His Father's creation.
 - 1. The portrait in our text points us to what Christ will ultimately accomplish on the cross, where He takes the curse upon Himself and He rises in conquest over it.
 - a. As Peter would write, alluding to Isa 53: *“He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed”* (1 Pet 2:24).
- E. So I don't know whether God will heal you now, or show up in your circumstances, your crises, now in precisely the way that you ask. I don't know. Certainly He is able. Certainly we will ask and plead. Certainly He will bring aid in one way or another.
 - 1. But I do know that, whether He chooses to fix things for us immediately now or not, it will all be fixed for us on the last day, with but a word from His mouth: *“For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command . . . And the dead in Christ will rise”* (1 Thess 4:16).
- F. So when your moments of crisis come, however big or mundane, cling to Him by faith, humbling yourself and exalting Him, convinced that He will get you through. And, in this, you too will cause the Marvelous One to marvel. Christ help us!