



# Jesus Commends the Centurion's Faith

Matthew 8:5–13



## LESSON GOAL

The student will rejoice that Jesus has provided salvation to all those who would have faith in Him.

## BIBLE TRUTHS

- The centurion was a powerful roman soldier.
- The centurion asked Jesus to heal his servant.
- Jesus saw that the centurion had great faith.
- You must have faith to enter heaven.

## KEY VERSE

“When Jesus heard it, He marveled, and said to those who followed, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!’” —*Matthew 8:10*

## APPLICATION

- Trust that Christ is the only way of salvation.
- Believe that Christ has all authority and obey Him.
- Ask God for help in times of need.
- Thank God because He is compassionate.

## NEXT WEEK

Jesus Calms the Storm and Casts Out Demons  
Matthew 8:23–34

### Symbol Key



Craft



Finger Play



Memory Verse



Object Lesson



Game



Visual Aid



Center



Activity



Q & A



Age Group



## PREPARE WITH THE TRUTH

*"Therefore you shall lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul... you shall teach them to your children." —Deuteronomy 11:18–19*

Please take time to prepare your mind and heart to accurately handle the truths of God's Word (2 Tim. 2:15). Read through the Bible background and study the truths contained in this lesson. Crucial background information is included here that will aid you in understanding the Scripture.

### Bible Background

#### Introduction

Matthew 8 begins where chapter 4 left off. Matthew summarized Jesus' ministry as one of teaching, preaching, and healing, all of which were to lead the Jews to repentance (Matt. 4:12–25). This issue of preparation and repentance then turns to the focus of faith for the Jews, as the Matthew directs his attention to Jesus' miracles (Matthew 8 and 9). Jesus' miraculous power was the supreme proof of His divinity and the irrefutable credentials of His messiahship (John 5:36; 10:25, 30; 14:10–11; 15:24). Despite such evidence, the Jews continued in their resistance to Jesus as the Messiah. Their prideful self-reliance in their lineage had prevented them from trusting this Galilean carpenter for salvation. It is at this point of resistance that Jesus now uses the faith of one Roman soldier to teach them of the faith required for salvation. Jesus demands that all who wish to have fellowship with Him come by faith, not by might. Because of this requirement, all are able to receive the salvation found in Jesus Christ the Messiah.

#### Faith Required (Matt. 8:5–7)

For those who live in a society where good health is taken largely for granted, it is difficult to appreciate the impact Jesus' healing ministry had in Palestine. Diseases at that time were rampant and life expectancy short. For people who seldom had the means to alleviate even the symptoms of disease, the prospect of a complete cure was almost too astounding to be believed. Jesus healing those in need had brought such immediate and widespread attention that crowds of people were flocking to him with their sick and lame (Matt. 4:24–25). Curious and hopeful, each person came presenting his or her need before Jesus. One such person who had come to Jesus proved to be a rather unexpected visitor.

Immediately upon entering the town of Capernaum, Jesus was approached by a Roman soldier (Matt. 8:5). That a centurion soldier would come to Jesus required a great deal of faith on His part. He was not only a Gentile but also an officer in the Roman army. He was a man who ordinarily would have been greatly hated by the Jews. Most of the Jews there in Capernaum would have considered this centurion unclean because of his race and despised him all the more as a symbol of Roman subjugation. Despite this discrimination, the centurion humbly came before Jesus anyway, troubled over the illness of one of his servants. The centurion expresses that his "servant lies at home paralyzed, and in terrible suffering" (8:6).

Jesus knew the man's heart and did not need to hear a direct request. He simply responded in love, saying, "I will come and heal him." Moved by the centurion's compassion for his servant, Jesus shows His willingness to enter the home of a Gentile. This was a striking offer because the dwelling places of Gentiles were considered unclean. To enter one would result in becoming unclean. This is the

first time that Jesus offers to actually go to a sick person. On all other occasions the sick are brought to him. Up until this point, He is never recorded as having entered a Gentile home. For a Gentile to now approach him and ask for help required tremendous faith on the centurion's part.

Jesus' willingness to serve the centurion also reveals a number of things about God. Firstly, Jesus was lovingly sympathetic to those with physical needs. This reveals the compassion of God toward those who suffer in this life. Secondly, Jesus ministered to the needs of someone who, especially in the eyes of the proud Jewish leaders, was on the lowest plane of human existence. This showed Christ's desire to serve the humblest members of society during His earthly ministry. Our Lord showed special compassion toward those for whom society had disdain.

### **Faith Demonstrated (Matt. 8:8–9)**

No one would have anticipated the centurion's response to the Lord's compassion. The centurion answered "Lord, I am not worthy for You to come under my roof. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed" (Matt. 8:8). Just as John the Baptist felt unworthy to baptize Jesus, so this centurion felt unworthy to entertain Jesus in his home. This response is surprising considering the centurion's position in the Roman army. He had been given great authority from the high emperor himself, commanding a group of a hundred men (as the title of his office suggests). Whatever he said was obeyed to the fullest extent. Yet despite such authority, this Gentile continually displayed a great deal of humility when interacting with Jesus.

This humility is largely the result of the soldier's unusual understanding of Christ's authority. The centurion twice addressed Jesus as "Lord". This was much more than a courtesy. The man had affirmed the divine lordship of Christ, believing that Jesus was indeed God and consequently had the power to heal his paralyzed servant. The centurion understood that anyone in authority can issue orders knowing that what he says will be done even though he himself is not present.

The centurion believed that Jesus' word was sufficient to heal his servant. All that was needed was for Jesus to say the word, and his servant would be healed. He knew that if he had the power to make his soldiers and slaves do his bidding by simply giving them orders, Jesus' supernatural powers could even more easily allow Him to say the word and cause his servant to be healed. The centurion's request is interesting considering that there has been no example of Jesus healing from a distance. So the centurion's faith proves unusually strong.

### **Faith Commended (Matt. 8:10–12)**

After the centurion's great display of faith, Matthew records Jesus' astonishment. Although, as God, Jesus knew all men's hearts, in humanness He was amazed that this Gentile soldier showed more genuine faith in Him than He had found with anyone in Israel. Many Jews had believed in Jesus, but none had shown the sincerity, sensitivity, humility, love, and depth of faith of this centurion. He had trusted in Jesus and in His ability and readiness to give help in unexpected ways. Faith like this was not to be expected from a Gentile. Jesus marvels at such faith (Matt. 8:10), and uses the centurion's words as a lesson for those "following him."

It is at this point that Matthew underlines the movement of the gospel message from the Jews to the Gentiles, or rather from the Jews to all people regardless of race. This Roman soldier would not be alone in his belief. Those who had less spiritual advantage and less opportunity to know God's truth—the Gentiles from east and west—would show greater response to the gospel than God's own chosen people. Jesus here makes it clear that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—or any other Jew—would be in heaven not because of their Jewishness but because of their saving faith.

Jesus teaches that any of those having responded to Jesus in faith would join the faithful Israelites of previous generations to enjoy eternal fellowship with God. He characterizes this fellowship as taking "their places at the feast," which the Jews would have understood as the messianic banquet in the world to come (Isa. 25:6–9; 65:13–14). According to Jewish tradition, this banquet did not usually anticipate the presence of Gentiles. But Jesus here insists that "many will come" (Matt. 8:11) from the east and west—representing the Gentiles—and join the patriarchs at the banquet. These patriarchs would undoubtedly be the recipients of God's blessing in the coming world; therefore, to be associated with them was to share the blessing. Jesus' words to the Capernaum Jews were startling in the extreme and utterly contradicted everything taught by their rabbis.

At the opposite end, Jesus makes sure that the destination of those who lack this saving faith are not left in doubt. Some of those who might be expected to respond to Jesus with faith and commitment will not do so. These individuals Jesus describes as the "subjects of the kingdom" (11:12), and can be understood as those Jews who relied on their ancestry for salvation. To the Jews, God had given a unique promises and privileges of His kingdom, but because they rejected the King when He came to them, they disqualified themselves from feasting through eternity. They will instead be "thrown outside into the darkness," excluded from the presence of God.

Being a physical descendant of Abraham was a great privilege and advantage (Rom 3:1–2), but in spite of what most Jews believed, it did not guarantee salvation. Those who reject Christ, even though they were physical descendants of Abraham, will have no place at the table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. They will instead be consigned to darkness where there are tears and gnashing of teeth, which are common descriptions for the misery to be experienced in hell. Such was the substance of Jesus' brief but sobering message to the unbelieving Jews just before He pronounced the healing of the centurion's slave.

### **Faith Affirmed (Matt. 8:13)**

It is not until after this teaching that Jesus again directs His attention to the centurion soldier. Here he again reaffirms the greatness of his faith as He said to Him, "Go! It will be done just as you believed it would" (Matt. 8:13). At that moment the slave was healed of his sickness. That the servant was healed was Jesus' affirmation that the centurion truly believed, because otherwise his servant would have remained sick and probably soon died.

### **Conclusion**

The idea that a Gentile would inherit the kingdom of God was foreign to the Jews. Yet, because of his humility and saving faith, Jesus had promised the centurion an open place at the banquet table in heaven. Because such faith is the requirement for salvation today, redemption is made available to all who would believe and commit themselves to Christ. Those who lack such faith and devotion (i.e., the self-reliant Jews) will not enjoy such a salvation. Instead they will be consigned to a life of separation from God, experiencing misery and pain for eternity in hell.

## POINT TO THE TRUTH

*"Give ear, O my people, to my law; incline your ears to the words of my mouth."  
—Psalm 78:1*

This section includes questions to review last week's lesson and ideas to prepare students for this week's lesson. Choose from the following ideas to point to the truths of this lesson.



### Review Questions:

What was important about Jesus moving from Galilee to Capernaum?  
*Matthew states that the move fulfilled a prophecy found in Isaiah 9:1–2.*

What message did Jesus preach?  
*Jesus preached the same message that John gave to the people saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near" (4:17).*

What four men did Jesus call to be His disciples?  
*The four men were two sets of brothers: Andrew/Simon, and James/John.*

What did the four men do when Jesus called them?  
*All four men immediately dropped their fishing nets, left their families, and followed Him.*



### Faith

Faith is trusting and believing something will happen before it does. A child has faith that his mother or father will come and pick them up after the class is over, even though it has not happened yet. He has faith that his mother and father will feed him lunch after church.



### Centurion

A centurion was a Roman officer in the army who was in charge of 100 men. The Jewish nation did not favor Rome or those who enforced its policies. This man was both a Roman soldier and a Gentile. A person of such a background and occupation could scarce expect a hearing with a Jewish leader as renowned as Jesus, much less for Him to come to his home or heal his servant. The children may understand something of how this man felt in terms familiar to their world. If the were playing against another team, how would they feel about going to ask someone in the other team to help them put their shoes on?



### Heaven and Hell

In this week's lesson the children will receive their first exposure to Jesus' teaching on heaven and hell. Heaven is the eternal (2 Cor. 5:21), immeasurable (Jer. 31:37), holy (Deut. 26:15) dwelling of God (1 Kings 8:30; Matt. 6:9) from whence He rules (Dan. 4:35; Isa. 66:1) and to where believers will return for their reward (Matt. 5:12). Hell is described as a place of everlasting punishment (Matt. 25:46), everlasting fire (Matt. 25:41, Is 33:14) and outer darkness (Matt. 8:12). It is a place where the body and soul are tormented (Matt. 5:29; Matt. 10:28) reserved for the eternal punishment of all the wicked who have rejected God and His Word (Ps. 9:17, Rev. 20:10). In today's lesson Jesus describes heaven as a banquet and hell as a place of torment. While the focus of the lesson is not on heaven and hell itself,



it is helpful to introduce the children to these two places which appear so frequently throughout Jesus' teaching. You may begin the discussion by asking children what sorts of punishment they dislike the most. What sorts of rewards do they like the most? What is the longest time they've ever been punished for? Use these thoughts to explain the eternal punishment of hell and the eternal reward of heaven. Be sure to come back to these points to explain to the children on what basis God will decide where they will spend eternity.



### **Authority and Obedience**

Today's lesson gives a clear demonstration of Jesus' absolute authority over sickness simply by the authority of His word. Children usually have a good understanding of this concept because of the authority that parents have been given over them. They can be reminded of this through a simple skit or puppet show in which one sibling is trying to get his toy back from the other but is too weak to do so. Upon realizing his inability, he appeals to mom to instruct his brother to please give his toy back. Mom has no need to enter into a wrestling match in order to regain the toy, but simply gives the instruction and the matter is resolved. In today's lesson a powerful Roman soldier encountered a problem that he could not resolve, but he knew of someone who had such great authority that he could fix it by just speaking. What was the problem and who could solve it? In today's lesson we will find out.



### **A Roman Soldier's Reputation**

Help the children understand why the Jews would be surprised that the centurion came to Jesus and that Jesus helped the centurion. The Jews would have hated the centurion because he represented the occupying Roman government. You can make the presence of an occupying force more real by having a helper or teacher come in dressed like some kind of soldier. The "soldier" can pretend to take over the class, boss around the other teachers and put up his own flag. The "soldier" can demand treats from the teachers and make them do work. The other teachers or helpers can pretend to be his enemy and talk about how much they hate the presence of the invading force. Ask the students if they think the "soldier" will ask the other teachers for help or if the other teachers would help him if he asked. You can have the children imagine how they would respond to an invading "soldier."

## PROCLAIM THE TRUTH

*"Telling to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and His strength and His wonderful works that He has done." —Psalm 78:4*

This section includes the Bible lesson, lesson questions, and praise and worship ideas. Song suggestions are included that you can use to proclaim your worship to God. Use the lesson questions to check the students' understanding. This section also includes various presentation ideas to use alongside the teaching time. Read the Bible passage several times before you read these pages. All teaching should be done right from the Bible.

### Bible Lesson

Jesus ministered to all kinds of people. He taught them what God expected from them, He preached to them so that they might repent, and He performed miracles so that they would know He was God. There were many false teachers, claiming that they were from God, but only Jesus was able to perform miracles that only God could do because He has power over every thing in the universe. The Jews continued to reject Jesus as their king, though. Jesus was not a rich and powerful king delivering them from the control of the Romans, as the Jews wanted Him to be. They were too prideful to see that this humble carpenter was their Savior.

Jesus used the faith demonstrated by a Roman soldier to teach the Jews about the faith that is required for salvation. When He entered a town called Capernaum, a Roman soldier, or centurion, came to talk to Jesus. Just approaching Jesus was an act of great faith for the soldier. He was not a Jew, and the Jews usually hated anybody who was not a Jew. He was also a Roman soldier, which Jews hated because the Romans had power over their government. They did not like that Gentiles (people who were not Jews) had power over them. But this soldier came to Jesus anyway and told Him of a servant of his that was very sick and suffering terribly.

Many people brought their sick family and friends to Jesus, because they knew that He could heal them. People saw that Jesus had power from God when He healed. They did not have many medicines, and the doctor's had not learned yet how to make people who got sick better. Most people who got sick died. This Roman soldier was very concerned for his servant, and knew that Jesus had the power to heal him. Before the man even asked Jesus to help, He offered to go to the soldier's house and heal the servant.

This was a shocking offer, because the Pharisees told the Jews that they could never enter the house of a Gentile, because it was unclean. But Jesus did not care what the Pharisees said, because they were teaching lies.

The centurion, however, showed Jesus how strong his faith was by saying, "Lord, I am not worthy for you to come under my roof. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed." (Matt. 8:8) He knew that Jesus was God, and that God was so powerful that He could just say that the servant would be healed, and it would happen.

Jesus was amazed at the centurion's great faith. He said, "Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!" (8:10) He took the opportunity to teach a lesson to the Jews about faith. Many Jews believed that just the fact that they were born a Jew saved them from hell, and that they would go to heaven. But Jesus told them that without faith, they would never be in heaven, and would spend eternity in hell, a terrible place.





Jesus turned to the centurion and said, "Go your way; and as you have believed, so let it be done for you" (8:13). The centurion's servant was healed at that moment!

The Jews could not imagine that a Gentile would inherit God's kingdom, but Jesus promised the centurion a place in heaven because of his faith. God has given his gift of salvation, not only to the Jews who would place their faith in Him, but to anyone in the world who is willing to place their faith in and follow Jesus Christ.

## Lesson Questions

Who is this man that came to Jesus?

*He was a centurion soldier, a high official of the Roman army. He was also a Gentile and not a Jew.*

Why did the centurion's visit with Jesus?

*The Bible says that the centurion came to Jesus asking for help. His servant was at home sick in bed, paralyzed and suffering great pain (8:5-6).*

What did the centurion ask of Jesus?

*He asked that Jesus would just say the word and his servant would be healed (8:8).*

How did Jesus respond to the centurion's faith.

*The Bible says that Jesus was astonished at the man's faith. He had not found so much faith in all of Israel.*

What was the result of the centurion's visit?

*Jesus healed the centurion's servant because he had come in great faith.*

## Presentation Ideas



### A Beka Book® Flash-A-Cards®

Use appropriate A Beka Book® Flash-A-Cards® with the lesson.



### Betty Lukens Flannel Graph

Use appropriate flannel graph pieces with the lesson.



### Banquet Table

Set up a banquet table with play food. Tell them that the people who have faith in Jesus will be with God for eternity and eat at His banquet table.



### Jesus Heals

Materials: Band-Aids, bottles of children's medicine (for colds, Tylenol, etc) stethoscope, First Aid kit, etc.

Directions: Ask the children what their father or mother would do if they were seriously ill (i.e., high fever, rash over body, pain in ears, etc). What they would think if their father or mother went to the doctor without them? How would they get well if the doctor did not see them and if they did not get their medicine? Explain how the centurion had faith in Jesus, that Jesus, who can heal all sicknesses, did not even need to come to see the sick servant. Because of the centurion's faith, the servant was healed the instant that Jesus said it.

## Praise and Worship

*Make Me A Servant*

*Change My Heart O God*

*He Is Lord*

## PRACTICE THE TRUTH

*"That they may set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments." —Psalm 78:7*

Choose ideas from this section that review and apply the truths of the Bible lesson.



### Tickets to the Banquet

In this week's lesson Jesus pictures heaven as a glorious banquet which we share with all those who have believed. Before the lesson, hand out tickets to each of the children. One or more must be distinctly marked or could even be a genuine ticket to a ball game, restaurant, etc. Explain to the children that each has a ticket, but only some of the tickets are genuine. The tickets are somewhat like their faith, they all believe in something, but only some have genuine faith. In today's lesson a Roman Centurion will help us recognize some of the characteristics of genuine faith. The centurion realized his need, recognized Jesus' authority, and responded in faith. After teaching the lesson you can explain to the children that in order to get to heaven's banquet we all require a genuine entrance ticket. That ticket means we need to realize our need (unforgiven sin), recognize Jesus' authority, and respond in humility and faith. Have those who have the genuine tickets come forward and claim their reward. There may be some complaining from children who were excluded but this provides the perfect opportunity to help the children realize that not everyone will receive the rewards of heaven, only those with genuine faith.



### Faith or No Faith

Make multiple cards with the words "FAITH" and "NO FAITH"; mix them up and put them face down in a pile on a table; have each child come up to the table and pick a card; if it is a "FAITH" card, then he gets to sit at the banquet table; if it is a "NO FAITH" card, he should pick again until he gets a "FAITH" card.

### Coloring Pages

Give each student a copy of the coloring pages at the back of the lesson. He or she can color the pages in class or take them home to color.



### MEMORY VERSE

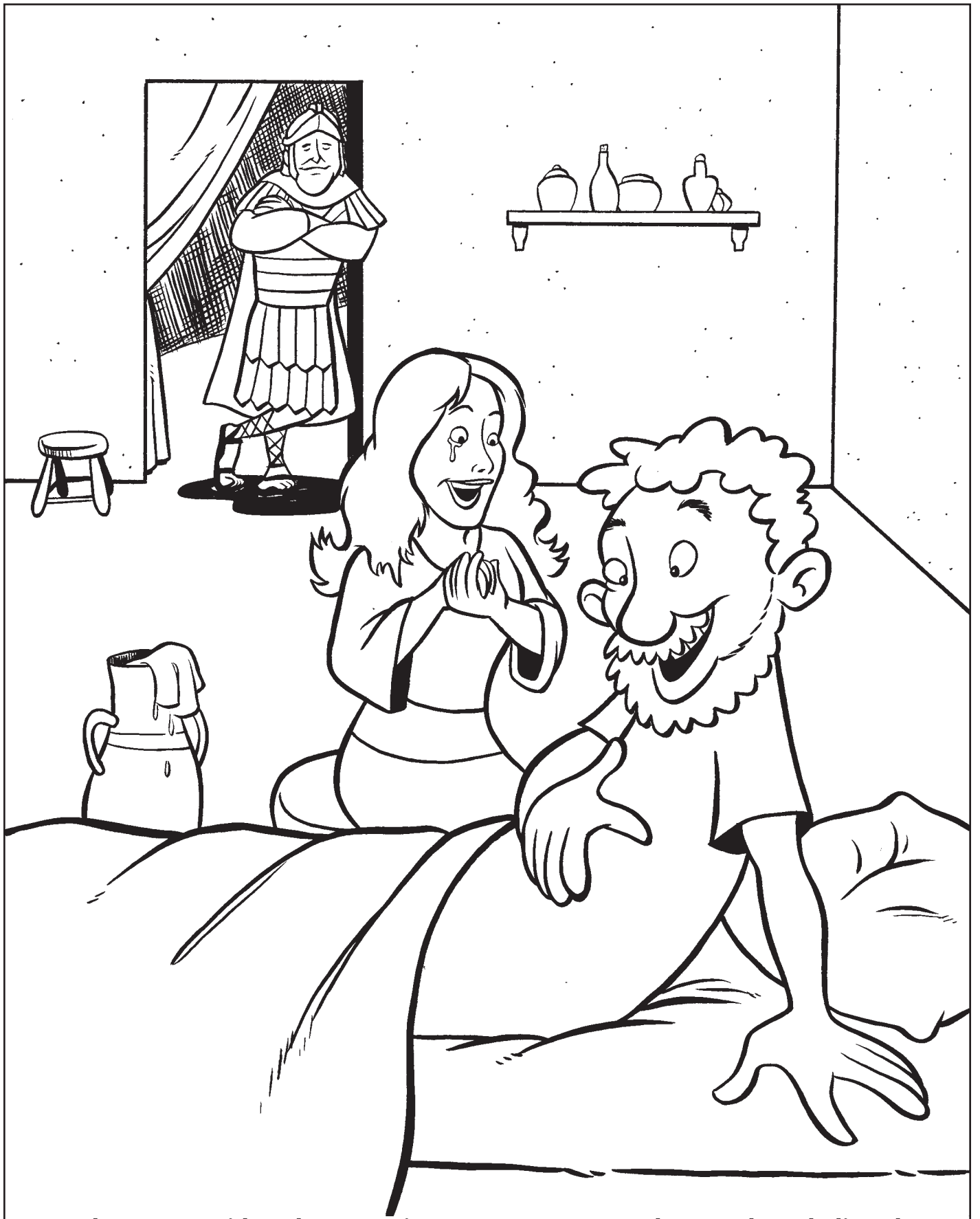
*"And those who know Your name will put their trust in You; For you, LORD, have not forsaken those who seek you." —Psalm 9:10*



**“The centurion answered and said, ‘Lord, I am not worthy that You should come under my roof. But only speak a word, and my servant will be healed.’”**

**—Matthew 8:8**





**"Then Jesus said to the centurion, 'Go your way; and as you have believed, so let it be done for you.' And his servant was healed that same hour."**

**—Matthew 8:13**

