



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.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

The student will be able to:

- Explain who the centurion was and what authority he had.
- Describe how the centurion responded to Jesus.
- Analyze why Jesus was astonished by the centurion's faith.
- Define what is essential to enter the kingdom of 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 alone is the way of salvation.
- Believe that Christ has all authority and obey Him.
- Ask God for help in times of need.
- Rejoice because God is compassionate.

NEXT WEEK

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

Symbol Key



Craft



Memory Verse



Object Lesson



Game



Visual Aid



Activity



Q & A



Work Sheet



2 Grade Level

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?
He fulfilled a prophecy found in Isaiah 9:1–2.

What message did Jesus preach?
Jesus preached the message, "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.



Jew and Gentile

The Jews were God's chosen people, the nation of Israel. The term "Gentile" refers to all those outside of the Jewish nation. Israel was chosen to reflect the will and character of God in a unique way and yet they were often led astray by the surrounding nations. As such, great animosity developed between the Jews and gentiles. The gentiles hated the Jews (Esth. 9:1,5; Ps. 44:13,14), often ravaged and defiled the holy land (Ps. 79:1) and were rebellious against God (Rom. 1:28). The Jews on the other hand, never associated with the gentiles (Acts 10:28) and regarded the gentiles as dogs (Matt. 15:26). The children may understand this tension in terms of various religions. The Roman centurion in today's story seems to have been a "god-fearer" which means that he may have converted from paganism to follow Jewish practices. In modern terms this would be similar to a Muslim becoming a Christian. In some Muslim countries such a decision would lead someone to be rejected or even killed. Have a short discussion about people from other religions who do not follow Christ, would not only provide the ideal opportunity to pray for the lost, but would also give the children some insight into the religious tensions which form the backdrop to this week's lesson.



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.



Centurion

A centurion was a Roman officer 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. How would they feel about going to the principle's office and asking him to come over to their house to play with them? 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?



Faith

Faith, as the Bible describes it, is a firm trust in God and His Word. While people may believe something very firmly, such belief is not "faith" if it is not founded upon the truths and promises of God's Word. Biblical faith is characterized by hearing God's Word and responding appropriately to it (Rom. 10:17). Throughout Jesus' ministry, many people flocked to hear His teaching and to benefit from His miracles (Matt. 15:29–31) but not all these people had faith in Him as the Christ (John 6:26–27) and many ultimately stopped following Him (John 6:66). Thus, while great multitudes were attracted to Jesus for various reasons e.g. His teaching, His miracles, and many believed that He could heal them, not all these people had biblical faith. Jesus declares the Centurion in today's lesson to be a noticeable exception to the crowds and even many in Israel. Ask the children to list some things they know about Jesus. Ask them how they have responded to those facts. Faith involves knowing the facts and responding appropriately. In this weeks lesson we will see how a Centurion responded appropriately to what he knew about Christ and was commended for his faith. You may want to come back to the children after the lesson and share the gospel, explaining that the Scriptures command them to respond to Christ in repentance and faith.



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

Passage Outline

Faith Required (Matt. 8:5–7)

Faith Demonstrated (Matt. 8:8–9)

Faith Commended (Matt. 8:10–12)

Faith Affirmed (Matt. 8:13)

Introduction

One of the most embarrassing moments in one young man's life was in grade school. After running a race he thought that he had won a race during the gym class, and went up to the front of the room to receive his prize. He was very confused when he saw the teacher give the first place trophy to another student. This young man had clearly run the race faster than any other student in the class. He had crossed the finished line first, so what was the problem? The teacher pulled the student aside and explained that during the race his shirt had not been tucked in. It was a rule in the class that had seemed so silly. Nevertheless, one of the requirements for the race was to have your shirt tucked in. To not meet the requirement was to forfeit the race. Well, many of the Jews during Jesus' earthly ministry found themselves in a similar, yet more serious situation. In today's lesson we learn what is required for one to receive salvation. Jesus here takes a moment to teach the Jews and us this most serious requirement through His encounter with one centurion soldier.



Lead-off Questions (LOQs)

LOQ: Who is this man that came to Jesus?

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

LOQ: What is so interesting about this soldier visiting Jesus?

Answer: During that time, Jews and Gentiles did not get along, and often avoided each other. For a Gentile man, not to mention a Roman soldier, to visit Jesus is a little out of the ordinary.

LOQ: What was the purpose of the centurion's visit with Jesus?

Answer: 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).

LOQ: What was Jesus' response to the man's request for help?

Answer: Jesus offered to go to his home and heal his servant (8:7). This would have been the first time Jesus had gone to a Gentile home to heal someone.

LOQ: How did the centurion respond to Jesus' offer?

Answer: The centurion responded in complete humility, stating that he was unworthy for the Lord to come under his roof (8:8).

LOQ: What did the centurion then request of Jesus?

Answer: He requested that Jesus would just say the word and his servant would be healed (8:8). He believed that Jesus had the power and authority to heal from even a great distance. There was no need for Jesus to travel to His home. He only needed to speak the word and his servant would be healed.

LOQ: How did Jesus respond to the centurion's faith.

Answer: The Bible says that Jesus was astonished at the man's faith. He had not found so much faith in all of Israel. Everything about the centurion's visit required faith on His part. He came as a Gentile, believing that Jesus could heal his servant by merely commanding it.

LOQ: What was it that Jesus took time to teach?

Answer: Jesus here uses the faith of the centurion soldier as an example of what is need for salvation. He says many Gentiles will come with the same faith and humility as the centurion, and will join the patriarchs of Israel in the kingdom of heaven. On the opposite end, Jesus teaches that those Jews who rely on anything else but faith for salvation would be thrown out into the darkness. Those who do not accept Jesus as the Messiah, and have faith in Him for salvation would be forever separated from God in hell. There they would experience severe pain and misery (8:11–12).

LOQ: What was the result of the centurion's visit?

Answer: Jesus healed the centurion's servant because he had come in great faith. The centurion greatly believed that Jesus was the Messiah, and that He possessed all authority.

Summary

That a Gentile would go to visit Jesus was a strange thing. Yet the centurion soldier was in great need and believed that Jesus had the ability to help him. With his servant lying sick and paralyzed at home, the Roman soldier came asking Jesus for help. Even though Jesus was willing to go to his home and heal his servant, the centurion felt completely unworthy for Jesus to come to His home. Besides that, he believed that Jesus traveling to his home was unnecessary. The centurion believed that Jesus needed only to say the word and his servant would be healed. Jesus had not seen such faith in all of Israel. Amazed at this, Jesus took the time to teach the Jews surrounding Himself and the centurion. His message would have been startling to the Jews listening. He taught that many more Gentiles would come from all over. Because of their faith in the Messiah, they would join the patriarchs of Israel in the kingdom of heaven. Those who would not come with such faith would be thrown into the darkness. Jews relying on their lineage for salvation would spend eternity in hell, experiencing great suffering for their sins. In the end, Jesus gives the centurion what he asked for. Because of His faith, the centurion's servant was healed.

Application

Because of His humility and 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 will not enjoy such a salvation. Instead they will be forever separated from God, and will be experiencing an eternity of pain and misery in hell.

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.

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.



"Jesus commends the centurion's faith"

Use this worksheet to reinforce the key truths of today's lesson. The worksheet is located at the back of the lesson.

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

Jesus *commends the* centurion's *faith*



Matthew 8:5-13

Name _____

1. Who came to Jesus in Capernaum? _____

2. A centurion was a Roman officer who commanded _____ men.

a. 10

c. 1,000

b. 100

d. 10,000

3. The centurion asked Jesus to _____ his sick servant.

4. The centurion admitted that he was not _____ for Jesus to enter his home.

5. The centurion believed that Jesus could heal his servant by _____.

6. Fill in the blanks from what Jesus said in Matthew 8:10.

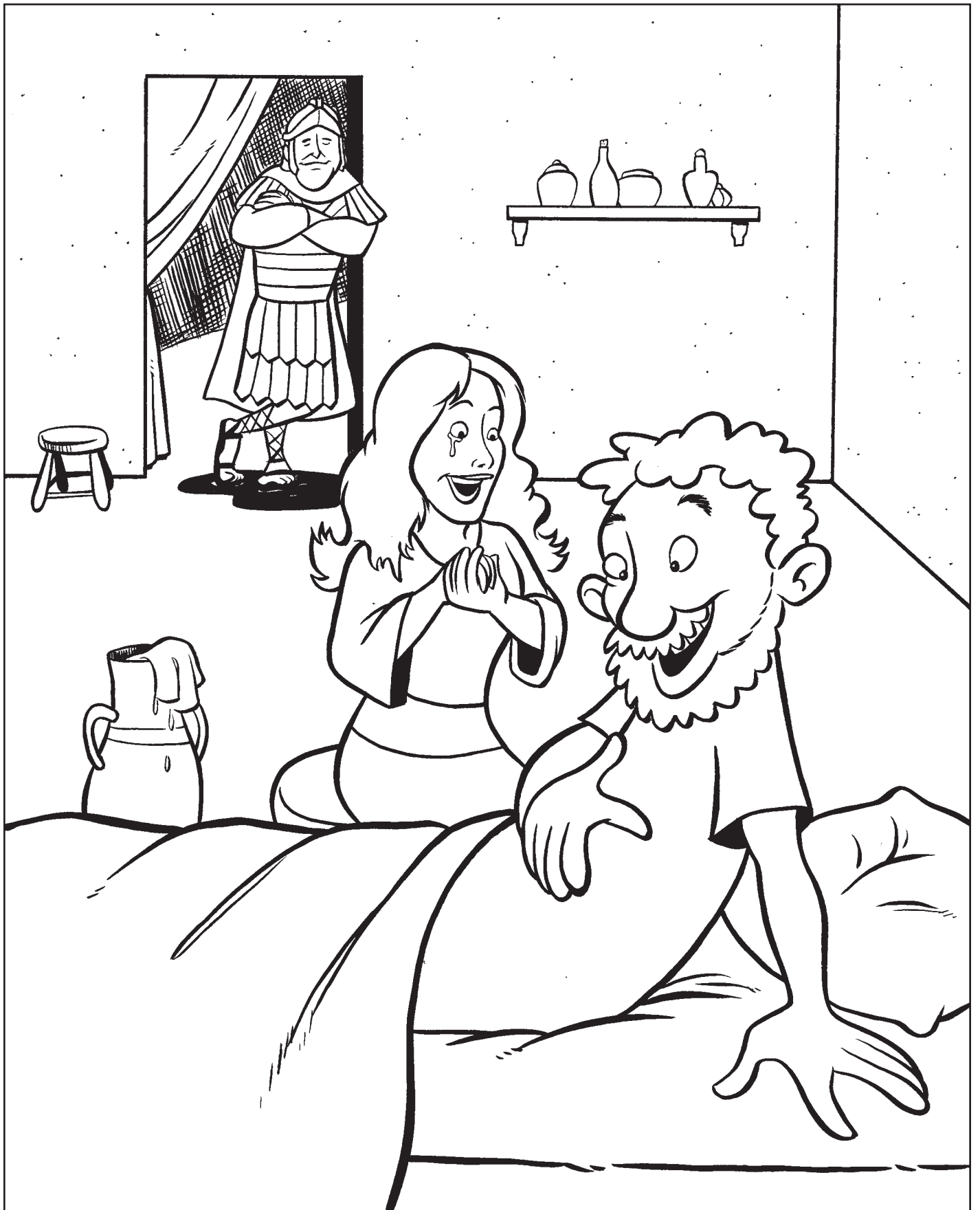
“Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found such great _____,
not even in Israel!”

7. Did Jesus heal the centurion's servant? _____



"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

