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Miracles, Eulogy for John (Part 1)



The Life and Teachings of Christ - Steve Gregg

In this lecture by Steve Gregg, he examines the story of the healing of the centurion's servant in Luke 7. Gregg points out that there are slight differences in the telling of the story in Matthew and Luke, but asserts that this is not evidence that the Gospels were not written by the authors to whom they are traditionally attributed. The centurion's faith, as well as his understanding of authority, are highlighted as examples of models that can be followed in the modern day.

Transcript

Let's turn to Luke chapter 7. In this session, we need to take the first 17 verses of this chapter, and then if we have time, there's some material in Matthew we need to cover as well. We're trying to take a chronological approach to the life of Christ, which means we're not just going through one or another gospel, we're going through them all. In the material we have before us, there are parallels.

We have in Luke and Matthew parallel material for most of what we're going to be studying. It happens that Luke is a little more complete, or gives some details on part of the material, and Matthew is more complete on the other part of the detail, which explains why I want to read part of it in Luke and part of it in Matthew. But we do want to access all the material that's found in both sections, and this is how we're treating the life of Christ.

This is our first session since we finished the Sermon on the Mount, which occupied us for quite a long time, which means we've been focusing for a few weeks on the teachings of Jesus. We now will be looking mostly, not so much at his teaching, but at his activities. Some of his principal important miracles are found in the material we're looking at today.

Luke 7, beginning at verse 1. Now, when he concluded all his sayings, by the way, you may notice that those sayings are the Sermon on the Mount. The immediately preceding material is Luke chapter 6, and the closing words of chapter 6 of Luke are the closing words of the Sermon on the Mount. So, when he had concluded all his sayings in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum, which of course was his headquarters by

now.

He had been rejected at Nazareth the first time he preached there, and so he had relocated to Capernaum, where he had some friends who had a house, which he made his outreach base. That was Peter's house. And a certain centurion's servant, who was dear to him, that is dear to the centurion, was sick and ready to die.

So when he heard about Jesus, he sent elders of the Jews to him, pleading with him to come and heal his servant. And when they came to Jesus, they begged him earnestly, saying that the one for whom he should do this was worthy, for he loves our nation and has built us a synagogue, they said. Then Jesus went with them, and when he was already not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to him, saying to him, Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof.

Therefore I did not even think myself worthy to come to you, but say the word and my servant will be healed. For I also am a man placed under authority, having 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.

When Jesus heard these things, he marveled at him and turned around and said to the crowd that followed him, I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel. And those who were sent, returning to the house, found the servant well, who had been sick. Now, here is one case that Matthew and Luke tell the same story, but tell it in a remarkably different fashion.

There are some small differences in the way that most of the Gospels tell many of the stories. Mark or Matthew or Luke will have his own particular detail that he includes that the others omit in many cases. But here it's an entirely different way of telling the story.

If you'll keep your finger at Luke 7 and turn over to Matthew 8, you'll see the difference immediately. In Matthew 8, beginning at verse 5, it's much shorter here, but it's different in a significant feature. It says, Now when Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him, pleading with him, saying, Lord, my servant is lying at home paralyzed, dreadfully tormented.

And Jesus said to him, I will come and heal him. 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. For I also am a man under authority, having soldiers under me.

And I say to this one, go, and he goes, and to another, come, and he comes. And to my servant, do this, and he does it. When Jesus heard it, he marveled and said to those who followed, Surely I say to you, I have not found such a great faith, not even in Israel.

Now, that's the same story, but do you notice one very important feature that is different? In Matthew, the centurion appears to have come to Jesus himself. And the

entire interchange, all that is spoken by the centurion and Jesus to each other, are rendered as if they were having a face-to-face conversation. Yet in Luke, it's very different.

As near as we can tell, Jesus never laid eyes on the man. He is first appealed to on the man's behalf by a group of Jews, elders of the Jews, who are friendly to the centurion, although he's a Gentile because he's made generous donations to the building of a synagogue. And they feel that they'd like to encourage this kind of friendly behavior on the part of Gentiles, especially on the part of the occupational army.

A centurion was a Roman officer, over a hundred Roman soldiers. Relations were fairly strained, by the way, between the Jews and the Romans in occupation there. And therefore, whenever a Roman officer showed this kind of kindness to the Jews, the Jews wanted to make sure they didn't do anything to spoil that relationship.

Let's keep these people on our side as much as we can. And now here's Jesus, a Jewish teacher, and these Jews have heard that Jesus can heal sickness, and here's an opportunity for the Jews to do a favor for this centurion. Now, that's fairly unusual for Jews to have an interest in a Gentile.

Most Jews wouldn't even touch a Gentile, or certainly wouldn't go into a Gentile's house. In fact, that's the very reason why the centurion won't let Jesus come into his house. He says, I'm not worried, you should come under my roof.

The man was obviously familiar with Jewish custom and religion. He had built a synagogue for them. Even though he was a non-Jew, he was very well acquainted with the culture of the people among whom he was stationed.

And he knew that no self-respecting Jew would enter the house of a Gentile. And so, when Jesus seemed to show no qualms about doing so, the man hastened to say, oh, I don't expect you to come into my house. It's not that the man didn't want to be hospitable.

He simply didn't want to put Jesus in a compromising position of going into the house of a Gentile. The centurion knew that Jesus couldn't care less about such customs of the Jews. And that he would have gladly gone into the house of a Gentile.

He hated among tax collectors and sinners and other people that the Jews wouldn't come near also. But the man simply wished to be polite and not to impose on Jesus. And so, he said, no, you can't come into my house.

You don't need to. You can just speak the word. Now, the point here is that the first part of the conversation is communicated to Jesus by elders of the Jews speaking on behalf of the centurion.

When Jesus actually begins to make the journey to the centurion's house, once again, someone other than the centurion speaks to Jesus. He sends servants out from the house, and they communicate the words, which Matthew includes as coming from the mouth of the centurion. Now, this is the kind of discrepancy in the Gospels that has led many skeptics to feel that the Gospels are untrustworthy, that the Gospels are full of contradictions.

And if full of contradictions, then they can't be inspired. They simply can't be trusted. And they say, well, certainly both of these stories can't be true.

Either Jesus spoke to the centurion, or he didn't. Luke's version has it that all this is communicated through the mouth of servants and friends and advocates, whereas Matthew has it spoken by the centurion himself to Jesus. Now, this is in fact one of the cases that we can point to as proof of the reliability of the Gospels.

Because many have felt that the Gospels have taken from a common tradition, and that they do not embody eyewitness accounts at all, but that the Gospels were written some considerable time after the apostles. This is what the liberal churches feel, liberal scholars feel. The Gospels were not really written by the men whose names they bear.

They were written much longer after the time of Christ than the time that they would seem to be written, and that they are really reflecting a common tradition. And there are so many things that are similar in the Gospels, word for word similar, that this is pointed to as proof of their dependency upon one another. It's proof that they are not independent witnesses, they say, but they have taken from a common tradition, and they do not have, in the cases where they're word for word the same, they don't have the appearance of independent witnesses.

Now, we know that in a court of law, if two witnesses give exactly the same testimony, then their testimony must be disregarded. It is an evidence that collusion has occurred, and that there has been some agreement beforehand as to what they will say, because without such collusion, two witnesses never say exactly the same thing. Now, occasionally you do find places in the Gospels where the Gospel writers say exactly the same thing, word for word.

And this is one of the things that causes radical critics to suggest that the Gospels are not authentic histories. However, along with those passages in the Gospels that say exactly the same thing as each other, there are those passages that say remarkably different things about the same story. One of those cases I may have pointed out to you before is in the story of the Transfiguration, which all three of the Synoptic Gospels record, but I believe it's, let's see if I can remember which Gospels say what, I believe it's Matthew and Mark say that after Jesus was at Caesarea Philippi, after six days, he took three disciples up on a mountain.

Which is what is the Mount of Transfiguration. Luke's version, if I'm getting the Gospels right, if it's not Luke, it's another one, but one of the Gospels says about eight days later. Now, after six days is about eight days.

I mean, seven is about eight, as you can get, without being eight. You know, I mean, after six days makes the seventh day. And seven is about eight, unless you're going to hit it right on eight.

And it doesn't say it was eight days, it says about eight. So, I mean, the stories are both reliable, but the remarkable thing is how independent they are in the way they tell it. If these people were drawing from a common source, rather than telling it as they remember it, you would expect them to copy each other somewhat more closely.

In fact, to say after six days is a very different way of telling the time period than to say about eight days, and yet it just shows the independence of the accounts. Likewise here, Matthew and Luke, if they were familiar with each other's work at all, and I think very possibly that Luke might have been familiar with Matthew, I don't know that, no one knows for sure which was written earlier, but Luke mentions that he had other previously written works available to him in his opening verse in Luke. He said he had access to those who were eyewitnesses, and that would include Matthew.

But, maybe, I mean, maybe it would include Matthew, he was an eyewitness. Whatever access they had to each other, or whatever familiarity they may have had with each other's work, it's quite clear that they were very independent in their way of telling stories. And here we have what looks, is such a mark of independence, it almost looks like a contradiction.

Now, let me clarify for you why this is not a contradiction. It is the case in a number of passages, and I'll show you several other examples besides this one, where when a thing is done by agents of a person, the scripture says it is done by that person. When something is done on behalf of, or at the behest of a person, then it can be said that that person has done it.

Just as if, when I left home, my wife would say, well, make sure you get gasoline in the car. And, so I got to school and found myself too busy, and asked, you know, Bill, would you take my car down and get gas? Here's some money, put some gas in the car for me. And he did so, and then later in the day, my wife says, did you get gas in the car? I could say yes.

Technically, I didn't take the car to the gas station, but I arranged for it, I paid for it, I did, you know, it was done on my behalf, at my behest, and so forth, to do it. In that sense, I did it. In another sense, I didn't do it, depending on how exact you want to be.

To say I did it, in such a case, would be to compress it into a briefer way of saying it. Of

course, you can unpack that, you could decompress it and tell all the details of all the actions the other parties had in the transaction, but that's not necessary to do for the sake of honesty. And we can find a number of cases in the Bible, and I'm sure in other literature as well, where what is done by somebody's agents, what is done because somebody requests it to be done, or done with his money, or done on his behalf, or at his behest, where it is said that that person did that very thing.

Let me show you at least four other scriptural examples, if I could. One of them is in Mark, chapter 10, in verse 35. Mark 10, in verse 35.

Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to Jesus, saying, Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask. Now, I don't know if you're familiar with the way that Matthew's gospel reads this. We won't turn there at the moment, but in Matthew 20, in verse 20, the same story is told, but it says that it was Philomi, the mother of these two boys, who came to Jesus with this request.

Now, Mark tells it as if the boys came to Jesus. I say boys, you know, the sons of this woman. They're adults, certainly.

As if these two men, these brothers, came to Jesus and asked this request. But, in fact, Matthew gives us a little more detail in that case. They came to Jesus with this request on behalf of their sons.

Well, no doubt they put her up to it. She was, after all, Jesus' aunt. She was Mary's sister.

We can deduce that from three passages in the gospels we don't have time to look at right now. But Philomi, the mother of Zebedee's children, was actually the sister of Mary, the mother of Jesus, therefore a close relative of Jesus. And so, perhaps, even though John and James were Jesus' first cousins, they felt like he might defer more to his aunt than to them.

Anyway, the point is that she went on their behalf, Matthew tells us in Matthew 20 and verse 20. But Mark, in compressing it, just talked about it as if they made this request. Well, they did, through their mother.

Now, in this case, and the one that we've just looked at with the centurion, skeptics could say, well, you know, you say that one is compressing the material and that there's no contradiction, but how do you know that that's really what they're intending? Maybe they really just had the story wrong. How can we be sure that this kind of compressing of the material is really done? After all, Mark and Matthew are different authors. Luke and Matthew are different authors.

And the examples I've just given you are cases where Mark says one thing and Matthew another, or Luke says one thing and Matthew another. But there are a number of cases where the same thing is done when it's the same author. Here's a case where it's a

different author, and then I'll show you some where it's the same author.

Acts 1.18. Speaking of Judas, the disciples in the upper room choosing to replace Judas with another, with reference to Judas, it says in Acts 1.18, now this man purchased a field with the wages of iniquity. Now, the rest of it we don't need to deal with right now. But the problem here is it says that Judas purchased a field with the wages of his iniquity.

According to Matthew chapter 27, that's not exactly how it happened. In Matthew chapter 27, verse 3, it says, Then Judas, his betrayer, seeing that he had been condemned, was remorseful and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, I have sinned and betrayed innocent blood. And they said, What is that to us? You see to it.

Then he threw down the pieces of silver and the temple departed and went and hanged himself. But the chief priests bought with them the potter's field, the very strangers, and therefore the field has been called the field of blood to this day. Now, here we have a situation where it's clear that Judas didn't buy this field.

The chief priests bought the field. Judas was dead by the time the field was purchased. However, in Acts it says, this man, Judas, purchased a field with the wages of iniquity.

Well, the money was his. It's true the transaction took place and it was bought, probably in his name. But whether it was bought in his name or not, it was bought with his money.

He provided the money for the purchase of the field. In a sense, he could be said to buy it. I can tell you that my grandmother bought this property for us.

This school was purchased by my grandmother's money. She donated the money to a great commission school and we bought these properties. Now, on the one hand, I can say my grandmother bought it.

I could even say my grandfather bought it but he was dead by the time we bought it. But he's the one who earned the money and provided for it to be given to us. And yet it was not really... My grandmother never saw the real estate agent we bought this from.

That was worked out by Bill and myself with the real estate agent. I did the buying, Bill and I did it, but spoken another way, and equally true, my grandmother bought the property because it was her money that was used. It was simply bought by someone else.

Someone else did the actual transaction, but it's equally true to say either way who did it. Here's another case. Acts chapter 21.

Now, here we have the case where the same author does this. Acts chapter 21, two

cases in the same chapter, two passages in the same chapter. Verse 11.

When he had come to us, he took Paul's belt, this is Agabus the prophet, bound his own hands and feet and said, O Jerusalem, bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him to the hands of the Gentiles. Now, if that is technically true, then we would expect the outworking of this to be seen in the Jews binding Paul and turning him over to the Gentiles. After all, Agabus said, thus says the Holy Spirit.

It's not as if this guy says, this is my opinion. He's saying the Holy Spirit says this. You can't be wrong unless he's a false prophet.

You just don't say the Holy Spirit says this and you're not labeled for doing that. But later in the same chapter, verse 33, it tells what really happened. Actually, in the verses before it, the Jews threw up a riot and almost killed Paul in the public square in Jerusalem outside the temple.

But the Romans heard about it. They saw a riot going on there and they came down. It says in verse 33, then the commander came near and took Paul and commanded him to be bound with two chains.

Paul got bound. By whom? By the Jews? Well, not exactly. By the Romans.

The commander of the Romans commanded him to be bound. I'm sure it was Roman soldiers, not Jews, who did the binding. Yet Agabus had said in verse 11 that the Jews would bind Paul.

As far as we know, they never did. Was this a false prophecy? No, it was true. It was simply true in the sense that the Jews were the instigators.

They didn't kill Paul, but it was because of Jewish instigation. The same is true, for example, in 1 Thessalonians 2, verse 15, where Paul says the Jews crucified Jesus. Did they really? The way I read it in my Bible, the Romans did that.

Four centurions nailed him to the cross. All Romans, not Jews. Yet, according to 1 Thessalonians, chapter 2, in verse 15, speaking of the Jews, it says who killed both the Lord Jesus and their own prophets.

Did the Jews kill Jesus? Not with their own hands, but they did because they were the ones who instigated the Romans to do so. Now, what Paul was saying was a matter of common knowledge. Paul couldn't have had it wrong.

When Paul said in 1 Thessalonians the Jews killed Jesus, it cannot be thought that Paul thought for a moment that the Jews had actually driven the nails in his hands. It's just a manner of speaking. By the way, in Acts chapter 2, in verse 23, speaking of Jesus, Peter says, Him being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, you,

meaning the Jewish listeners, have taken by lawless hands and have crucified and put to death.

Now, the Jews, he says, had crucified and put to death Jesus by lawless hands, that is by Gentiles who are not under the law, by the use of, through the agency of Romans. Yeah, the Jews didn't do it with their own hands, but they still did it, Peter said. So what is done on behalf of another is spoken of as if that other has done it.

And no doubt we can multiply many examples both in common everyday speech today and in all literature, and no doubt there are many other cases in the Bible as well where this is the way it's spoken. In any case, all of this is to say it is not uncommon nor embarrassing for one gospel writer to say that agents of a certain person came and communicated certain things to Jesus, and for another gospel writer to say that that man did it, because he did through his agents, through his messengers. So Luke just decompresses the story for us.

He gives us the more detail, and that's why we're reading it in Luke. Okay, let's look at the story as quickly as we can here. It says in verse 2, this is Luke 7, verse 2, A certain centurion's servant who was dear to him was sick and ready to die.

Now we got some evidence that this centurion is not your typical macho Roman officer. Now he clearly had authority, and he even mentions that in verse 8. I am a man placed under authority, and I have soldiers under me, and I give commands and they do it. Here's a man who was in authority, but he had a heart too.

It just shows that hierarchical authority doesn't always have to result in tyranny or in exploitation or in oppression. The fact that this centurion, without any compulsion from the Lord, no compulsion being upon him at all, actually built a synagogue for the Jews, who, that is the Jews, had no rights to such things. I mean, the Jews actually lost a great number of their rights when the Romans came in, and yet this guy, just out of the goodness of his heart, to the people whose land he was occupying, to the people who had to more or less lick his sandals if he asked them to, that he would donate out of his own pocket money enough to build them a synagogue, he may have been a slave.

In either case, the centurion was a man of authority over his servants. If it was a slave, then it was just a piece of chattel according to the culture of the time. The Roman law allowed men to kill their slaves if they wished.

They were just a piece of property. And if it was a soldier who was subordinate to him, yet it would be one, because he was a servant, probably one of very low rank. He was dear to them.

It's not inconceivable. There are some authorities who have a heart for people. This is one of them.

It shows that authority doesn't necessarily corrupt a man. In fact, in addition to these indicators of this man's generosity, we have Jesus' own commendation at the end of this story that Jesus had not encountered faith like the faith of this man in the entire nation of Israel. The Gentiles were not.

The Romans were not. And yet here is a Roman who has greater faith than any of the Jews that Jesus had thus far met. So this was a man who was an unusual Jew.

In fact, it would take an unusual Roman to get the elders of the Jews on his side because they chafed under the Roman oppression and Roman occupation. In other words, this guy has been an awfully easy guy for them to labor under. He's been a very compassionate fellow.

Even his servants are dear to him and he's concerned about their well-being. Not because he couldn't replace him. A man with 100 soldiers under him could easily, if his servant died, just replace him.

But the man was concerned about his servant's well-being because he was dear to him. So when he heard about Jesus, he was thinking that Jesus, whom he had never met, would be just as bigoted toward Gentiles as most Jews were. And certainly the most bigoted were the rabbis and the Pharisees and so forth.

And no doubt, hearing about this rabbi Jesus, the centurion doubted that this man Jesus would give him the time of day. But perhaps if the elders of the Jews came to Jesus, he would listen to them. He would stop assuming these things.

The fact of the matter is Jesus was more at odds with the elders of the Jews than he was with any of the Gentiles he ever encountered in his lifetime. Most of the Gentiles he encountered in his lifetime ended up getting a miracle out of him. The elders of the Jews got very little out of him except rebukes.

And yet, of course, the centurion would not know that Jesus was such an unusual rabbi as this that he would not request pleading with Jesus to come and heal his servant. And when they came to Jesus, they begged him earnestly saying that this one for whom he should do this was worthy for he loves our nation and has built us a synagogue. Now, I want to point out that he loved their nation.

Not many Romans loved the Jews. An assignment in Palestine was what most Romans dreaded. You know why? Because the Jews were the most that the Romans ever had to keep under their heel.

The Jews were full of zealots like Judas of Galilee who started the zealot party. The zealots who held out at Masada until three years after Jerusalem fell. They were tenacious.

They were ungovernable. In fact, it was their conviction that it was a betrayal of their God to pay tribute to any other king and to take back from these guerrilla zealots. And if that wasn't bad enough, the whole population was so volatile that they were easily stirred up to riots and chaos and more than one Roman procurator had to order his armies to just kill at random to put down rebellions among the Jews.

And it was almost like a punishment to any Roman officer that he was sent to be stationed in Palestine. But here's a Roman officer who loved his nation. What an incredible thing that is.

Here is a man like Cornelius. And there's no reason certainly to believe that this was Cornelius since Cornelius in the book of Acts had never heard of Jesus. It would seem prior to Peter coming to him.

But there were a few Roman officers who were devout. They had seen that the Jews did have a God who was superior to the false gods of the Romans and who, I guess, gave some credence to their religion. Why else would he build them a synagogue? Why else would he love their nation? Why else would he seek one of their rabbis for help in a crisis? Well, he could have called probably any number of physicians.

Being an officer, he would have had access to a lot of resources that way. But this is a man who was spiritually minded. He is described even by the Jews as worthy of a favor from Jesus.

Now, verse 6 says, when he was already not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to him, apparently having second thoughts about Jesus coming in. He first sent them asking Jesus to come and heal his servant. But apparently in the time it took for these messengers to bring Jesus back and for Jesus to come close to the house, he had second thoughts.

He said, well, I can't expect him to come into my house. He's a Jew. He can't come into a Gentile's house.

So he sent out messengers saying, I'm not worthy. But his view of himself was he was not worthy. For a man who was an officer of over 100 soldiers, to say to a Jewish peasant, I'm not worthy to have you in my house, took a real humility that was not characteristic at all of the proud Roman soldiers and officers and so forth.

And so we see this man was a man that God had really worked on his heart to make him soft. How he became an officer and their Spartan, you know, lifestyles and their invincibility to pain. In fact, they were taught to not cringe or wince, even when they're being cut in battle.

They were, I mean, they were just trained to be like robots almost. And here's a guy who's got a big heart and who's spiritually alive. And yet somehow he's moved up

through the ranks in the Roman army to get an opposite position.

It's possible, of course, but we can't change his heart. We cannot say we simply don't know. All we can mark is the unusual nature of this.

Here's the Jews are saying that this Gentile is worthy, but the Gentile says to himself, I'm not worthy. He is not appealing to Jesus on the basis of his own worthiness. Obviously, he's appealing for grace to have that which for which he knows he's not worthy.

He says, therefore, I didn't even think myself worthy to come to you, but you're worthy to hear 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.

Now, when Jesus heard these things, he marveled at him and turned around and said to the crowd that followed him, I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel. Now, Jesus' response to this is a, oh, I don't know, a little surprising, maybe not too much. I mean, but there were Jewish people that there were people who'd left all to follow Jesus.

There were people who'd received miracles in his hands. What's so special about this guy? Why is his faith better? What is it about this man's statement that causes Jesus to marvel? You know, how do you get somebody who's familiar with everything in the universe to marvel? How do you amaze somebody who's seen it all or knows it all? I mean, for Jesus to marvel, it takes something really exceptional, I would imagine. Although the Bible says he marveled at Nazareth that they had so little faith.

It said he could do no mighty works there, and he marveled that they had such little faith. We'll talk about that another time when we come to that story. But Jesus marveled at how little faith his own countrymen had, and he marveled at how much faith a non-Jewish person had.

Actually, I suppose we've already pointed out what things make this so marvelous, that a Roman centurion would care about his servants enough to even appeal and even humble himself to a Jewish rabbi and say, would you please come get my servant and heal him, that he wouldn't think himself not worthy to have this peasant under his roof who would love the nation and build a synagogue for the Jews. This is an unusual Gentile to say the least, and maybe those things are all part of the whole thing that made Jesus marvel. But the man's statement apparently, in particular, reflected some insight that Jesus was astonished that the man had.

The man understood the way that authority works. I'm an under-authority, and I have soldiers under me. In other words, I'm just a link in a chain.

There's some above and some below. I'm just filling a gap in here, and that's how it works. No doubt you've heard of the expression chain of command.

I'm a little cautious about using that term because of the way it has been applied in some cases. For instance, in the shepherding movement, this idea of the chain of command was very frequently used as a means of bringing people under, really, maybe you've never heard anything negative under this term, whatever you may have heard or not heard. The fact remains that there is a concept which is a basic understanding of how authority works.

The ruler of the world in those days, humanly speaking, was the Caesar. At this point, it was Caesar Tiberius. And under him were others, officers who were subordinate to Caesar.

There were those who were commanders of the entire armed forces, under Caesar, of course. And from those top commanders down to this centurion, there is no doubt a whole hierarchy of officers just like there is in any military. And then the centurion wasn't at the lowest point, there were still some below him.

And so we see that for Caesar to govern his armies or his citizens, he didn't do so by personal, direct contact with each soldier. He did so through a series of ranks that were appointed by him. And each person standing under the proper authority, that's what the word submit actually means in the Greek, it means to stand under.

Each person standing under the proper authority in the chain, kept the authority in a position to flow without a break. Now, you see, as long as the centurion was connected and submitted to the authorities that were above him, he could give commands and the authority of Caesar himself came unbroken through that chain down to the soldier. It would not be in the centurion's will but Caesar's will.

It would not be an act of rebellion against the centurion, it would be an act of rebellion against the Caesar himself who stood at the top of that chain and who ordered his authority through every link of that chain. Now, on the other hand, if the centurion refused to obey those who were over him, I don't know the name of the officer that was above the centurion, I've actually, I don't know, I'm sure it's available if I would research more carefully, but suffice it to say there was an officer above the centurion. He even says to himself, I'm a man under authority.

But suppose he violated that authority, suppose he broke rank, suppose he said to those under authority that he was under authority, he said, I don't care what you want, I'm going to do what I want and they started giving orders to those who were under him. They wouldn't have to obey him if the authority was above him. And if a centurion was in rebellion against the authorities above him, any orders he gave to his supporters could be disregarded because violation of the centurion's authority would not in that case be a violation of Caesar's authority, it was the centurion himself who was in violation of Caesar's authority.

And this is how we are to understand authority in every realm, whether it's church authority or governmental authority or family authority. And as long as the government officials submit to Christ with reference to what he's ordained them to do, then they have authority to speak and we have to obey them. When they rebel against Christ and give orders that are contrary to his, then we are obliged to obey Jesus, not man.

As long as there is an unbroken submission in every level of authority, then the authority of the top man or the top individual can flow unbroken through that chain and those at the bottom, by submitting simply to the person above them, is submitting to the person at the top of the chain. Well, this is what the man knew. This is what he said.

And he said, therefore, Jesus, I know that you can just give a command, just like I can. You don't have to do it yourself. The Caesar on his throne doesn't have to govern every individual detail of the army.

And his authority goes through the entire chain down to the bottom link to do whatever has to be done without Caesar having to personally give personal attention to it. And what he's saying about Jesus in this case is, Lord, I know that you stand in a position analogous to that. Caesar doesn't have to come down here and tell my servants what to do.

I'm under proper authority and my servants are under me and whatever I command, if I'm speaking what Caesar wants done, then my servants have to obey and speak personally down and speak to each soldier. And he says, that's what I understand about you. I understand, Jesus, that you are in that kind of a position with reference to the powers of the universe, whatever they may be.

Now, he probably understood the Jewish concept of God. I mean, having built a synagogue, it's very possible he was what is usually called a God fearer, a Gentile who actually participated in synagogue worship that probably had not gone so far as a God fearer. He probably didn't just have this vague idea of the powers that be out there.

He probably knew something about the personal God of the Jews and in saying, you know, it's this God and his angels and his powers that he sends out that really get things done. And saying that, Jesus, you can just give the command and these other powers will take care of it. These other subordinates have something to be done which only invisible forces could be looked to do.

Especially if he was saying, don't bother to come personally into my house, just give the word. Obviously, he assumed that whatever was going to happen between Jesus speaking the word and the servant being healed was going to be some invisible transaction, something that did not require a visible Jesus present in the house to do it. Therefore, we must assume that he recognized that Jesus stood in this special authoritative relationship to the universe and to the angels or to whoever it was,

whatever invisible powers this man believed would heal his servant.

He knew that Jesus was in charge of those. Just like he, the centurion, was in charge of the soldiers under him. And for him to grasp this spiritual concept was to go way beyond what any of the Jews, probably even the disciples, had grasped.

They had grasped that Jesus was, or was at least probably, the Messiah. But their idea of the Messiah was a very materialistic and political kind of a concept. To the very end, the disciples still didn't fully understand that the kingdom of God was spiritual in nature.

That is, until the end of Jesus' earthly life. They learned it after Pentecost. But they still were looking for political, physical demonstrations of his authority.

Because he had only heard about Jesus. So he must have put two and two together and thought, this Jesus must be God himself, or someone very close to being God. He's not just some kind of Davidic king coming in to overthrow us Romans.

He's got some kind of spiritual authority. Perhaps he'd heard about the demons being driven out by Jesus' words. That had first happened in Capernaum, and that's where this man was.

And the news of it had gone throughout the entire city, we were told earlier. And this man had first heard about Jesus because of that. And had deduced that Jesus was not only a political type of person, in fact not even a political type of person, but was in fact in authority in the spiritual realm.

And therefore he figured Jesus must have under his command all kinds of spiritual forces that he could just give commands and they could go and carry his power to heal the servant. Well, the man was right. Now, Matthew adds a little bit more here in verse nine, Luke 7, 9. Jesus said, I have not found such great faith not even in Israel.

Now, Matthew follows that statement with another statement that seems appropriate in the place, although Luke places this addendum in another part of his gospel. In Matthew 8, after Jesus points out that he had not found such great faith even in Israel, that's Matthew 8, 10. In Luke 7, Jesus says, And I say to you, he's talking to the people, that many will come from the east and west and sit down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.

But the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into outer darkness and there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then Jesus said to the centurion, Go your way and as you have believed so let it be done for you. And the servant was healed that same hour.

And he was cast out. Luke doesn't have that statement connected to this story. Luke has that statement found several chapters later in Luke 13, but he doesn't connect it with the centurion story.

Now, we know that Matthew sometimes groups things topically and it's possible that Luke gives us the correct order of the events and Matthew has put the statement of Jesus in this position because it fits well with what was happening in this story. In any case, we can't be sure. Maybe Jesus made the same statement twice.

Who knows? But the point is that this was a case, an instance of a Gentile who was exhibiting greater faith than the Jews. And Jesus' statement that Matthew records following it is a statement that this is not an isolated case. There will be many more like this.

There will be many Gentiles from the east and the west, people from other countries along with the faithful Jews, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But many Jews who do not have this kind of faith, the children of the kingdom, the natural heirs of the kingdom, the Jews, will be cast out. Why? Because of their lack of faith.

Now, whether Jesus made the statement on this occasion or not, it certainly fits well in this occasion and Matthew, for obvious reasons, could have put it here for that reason. Here's a case of a Gentile that Jesus himself says that many will come from the east and the west. They will enter the kingdom.

They will be saved. And yet the children of the kingdom, the natural Jewish people who would be thought to be the natural heirs of the kingdom, many of them won't come in because of their lack of faith. Paul puts this in another figure in Romans 11 where he talks about the olive tree.

He said the natural branches, the children of the kingdom, have been grafted in by our faith. And he says that we stand there by faith. And if we don't continue in faith, then we will be cut off just like the Jews were who are off because of faith.

Same idea. The idea is that those who are saved, those who are on the olive tree, those who are in the kingdom are people who have faith regardless of their race, regardless of whether they're Jew or Gentile. Likewise, those that are outside the kingdom in outer darkness, those who are cut off from the olive tree, are people who are cut off.

Now Jesus makes this statement the way he does because of the irony of it. You would expect the larger number of believers to come from the ranks of the Jews who had a long history and heritage of knowing God. And the Gentiles who had never known a thing about God but had worshipped idols and in most societies had even sacrificed their children to dumb idols, that these would come in great numbers into the kingdom and many of those Jews who would have been expected to embrace it will be cast out.