



"Being born in the church no more makes you into a Christian than being born in an airplane factory turns you into a 747."

—Billy Sunday

03-Apr-20

Heirs of the Kingdom

In my studies, I happened across [Matthew 8:5-13](#), the story of Jesus' conversation with a centurion whose servant had become paralyzed and was in great pain:

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, "Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found such great [faith](#), not even in Israel! And I say to you that many will come from 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. 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 his servant was healed that same hour.

Of particular interest are verses 11-12: "[M]any will . . . sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the sons of the kingdom will be cast into outer darkness." How could that be?

At first, Jesus' declaration may seem a bit odd. Notice that the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are *in* God's Kingdom, but "the sons of the kingdom" are not—to the contrary, they find themselves cast into outer darkness! Jesus makes a distinction between "many . . . from east and west," that is, Gentiles like the centurion, and the Jews of His day, who were Abraham's rightful, physical heirs. The kingdom that [God](#) had established through David was a physical one, and despite it no longer existing, the Jews still considered themselves to be its subjects.

The Jews believed that they had a natural right to the privileges of that kingdom. They thought and fervently hoped that the Messiah would come and throw off their Roman oppressors, bless and enlarge their nation, and lead it back to the triumphs and glories it enjoyed under David and Solomon. They called themselves, therefore, "the children of the kingdom."

This thinking led them to suppose themselves—and only themselves—to be the special favorites of God in heaven. Christ, however, impressed with the outstanding faith of this Gentile centurion, foretells that people from all over [the world](#) would fellowship as brethren with Israel's patriarchs in the [Kingdom of God](#), but the self-important yet faithless Jews who rejected Him would not be there. They would instead suffer the punishment of unbelievers and apostates.

The Jews thought that, since their bloodlines stretched back unbroken to Abraham, and what is more, they had the Temple in their midst, they were safe. They believed that in their self-proclaimed position under God, they

could do anything that pleased them, no matter the stench it left in the nose of God (see [Isaiah 65:1-7](#); [Ezekiel 8:17-18](#)). Jesus points out just a few of their many faults in His diatribe against them in Matthew 23.

But mere natural birth does not bring spiritual sonship, as John the Baptist had warned them about even before Jesus began His ministry. He urged them to repent, but the Jews, because of their supposed exalted position before God, saw no need for [repentance](#). In [Matthew 3:8-10](#), a passage that parallels Jesus' words to the centurion, John makes it plain that being related to Abraham provides little leverage with God:

Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not think to say to yourselves, "We have Abraham as our father." For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones. And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown in the fire.

The Good News Bible renders verse 9 as, "And don't think you can escape punishment by saying that Abraham is your ancestor. I tell you that God can take these rocks and make descendants for Abraham!" Physical descent means little in the grand scheme of salvation.

Their self-serving attitude stretched back for many generations. Six hundred years before, the prophet Jeremiah had pointed out their erroneous mindset in [Jeremiah 7:8-11](#):

"Behold, you trust in lying words that cannot profit. Will you steal, murder, commit [adultery](#), swear falsely, burn incense to Baal, and walk after other gods whom you do not know, and then come and stand before Me in this house which is called by My name, and say, 'We are delivered to do all these abominations'? Has this house, which is called by My name, become a den of thieves in your eyes? Behold, I, even I, have seen it," says the LORD.

Little had changed in their attitudes since God had destroyed the Kingdom of Judah for this very reason! God sent both John the Baptist and Jesus to give them another witness of the error of their ways. But, as we know, they rejected it and paid the price forty years later.

The centurion in Matthew 8 was a heathen, a Roman soldier, yet he was on his way to becoming a converted, godly man. Compared to many Jews who should have known better, he was a paragon of virtue. Under God's plan of salvation, an individual's descent or station in life is no excuse for unbelief and [sin](#), nor must it be a hindrance to faith and obedience.

The centurion demonstrates what God expects; he humbles himself and shows his faith: "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](#)). These actions were so rare among the Jews that Jesus, astonished to see it in this Gentile, commends him for it. It stands as a model of faith for all to follow. This scene illustrates that, like physical healing, spiritual salvation is at once the effect and the evidence of the faith a person receives from God.

The Jews, the natural children of faithful Abraham and heirs of the promises made to him, will be "cast out," as [Matthew 8:12](#) predicts, if they fail to go through this same process of humility and faith. Such is their fate if they continue to reject the Messiah, from whom all blessings flow.

Yet those whom God calls to join in the faith of Abraham—no matter who they are in this world—will find themselves exalted as Christ's brethren. "And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" ([Galatians 3:29](#)). It is they, coming from east and west, who will sit down in fellowship with the esteemed patriarchs in the Kingdom of God, in the New Jerusalem. Remain humble and faithful to claim this glorious reward!

- Mike Fuhrer

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[From Pride to Humility](#)

by John O. Reid

God hates pride and presumptuous self-sufficiency but loves the person who is humble and trembles at His word. Pride consists of emphasizing our own personal endowments, accomplishments, or possessions, presumptuously trusting in our own deceitful heart rather than in God's direction. Two tests to reveal the presence of pernicious pride in ourselves consists of the way we treat others (especially members of our own family) and the way we receive instruction or correction from others. God resists the proud but accepts the humble. Humbleness produces sensitivity toward God, enabling us to be molded and fashioned by God into His purpose.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[Searching for Israel \(Part One\): The Promises to the Faithful](#)

by Charles Whitaker

Where is Israel among modern nations? Charles Whitaker begins a twelve-part series on the identity of modern Israel, using search criteria to point to the whereabouts of the "lost tribes." The first article deals with God's promises to the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

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