

“Jesus Is the Preserver of Life!”

As I was preparing for this message, this Scripture struck me as somewhat like another distant healing story. So, I hunted up the other miracle healing story. **I found it in Luke 7:1-10 and Matthew 8:5-13.** This other story is not found in Mark. Since it is not in Mark and both Luke and Matthew report the same basic account, they most likely have the same common source. This source is often called “the Q document”. That document has not been uncovered as a separate manuscript but the many times when both Matthew and Luke tell the same stories, which are not also in Mark, have been surmised by many scholars to be from this missing common source.

Today’s Scripture and the other healing story in Luke and Matthew have some differences but they also have some things in common. In all three gospels, the person healed was in Capernaum. In all three gospels, the healing is done by Jesus from a distance. **All of those accounts also report it was a person of authority, who asked Jesus to do the healing.** In John, the request came from a government official. In Matthew and Luke, it was a Roman Officer – clearly a Roman government official, who sought Jesus’ help, but **Matthew says the officer made his appeal face to face with Jesus, while Luke says the officer communicated to Jesus through messengers.**

Now, let’s consider the differences between today’s Reading and the story told in Matthew and Luke. The sick person in our Scripture is a young boy, who is the son of the government official. In Luke, the sick person is a beloved servant of the Roman Officer. Matthew dropped the beloved part and just reported the ill man as a servant of the Roman Officer. In all three gospels, the person is healed by Jesus from a distance – he is not present with the sick person. **In John, Jesus sent the father on with the promise his son would live.** However, in Luke and Matthew, the Roman Officer made a big deal of understanding authority and he humbly told Jesus he only needed to say the word and the servant would be healed. In both Luke and Matthew, Jesus publically praised the Roman Officer’s trust in Jesus’ authority.

Although much of what Matthew and Luke wrote about in their story of the healing of the Roman Officer’s servant is very similar, **the fact there are some major differences between their accounts, such as whether or not the Roman Officer was present with Jesus, indicates one, if not both of those Synoptic Gospel authors, had another source or sources, who threw doubt on some of the details about the story, which the gospel authors had received from “the Q Document”.** Perhaps, the differences between Luke’s and Matthew’s accounts create the opening to perceive John’s eyewitness account of the story of Jesus’ healing of the Official’s loved one from a distance to be more accurate than either Luke’s or Matthew’s versions.

Further, this Scripture is evidence of the new direction Jesus pursued following his intentional separation from John the Baptist and from the path the Baptizer set. Shortly before this Scripture, Jesus physically separated himself and his ministry from the general area where John the Baptist was baptizing. He learned rumors were spreading about him having more disciples than the Baptizer. Jesus decided it was time to relocate and begin going in a new direction.

Earlier, Jesus seemed to be fulfilling the ministry John the Baptist put before him. It was the path of judgment on and purification of the nation. Jesus' Cleansing of the Temple in John 2:13-22 was the high point of the type of actions the Baptizer expected from him. Soon, Jesus began to transition to a new direction. He revealed this new direction as his purpose during his meeting under the cover of night, with Nicodemus, saying in **John 3:17**, "***For God did not send His Son into the world to be its Judge, but to be its Savior.***"

Jesus decided to halt the building up of envy and potential conflict between his disciples and those of the Baptizer by leaving the area. He boldly attacked the societal prejudices and struck out on his new path by traveling through Samaria and ministering to the woman at the well and her Samaritan town.

Jesus' emphasis on saving and healing was shown through the miracle reported in today's Scripture. Jesus revealed the people's shallowness and their dependency on miracles in order for them to become followers. Jesus said in **John 4:48**, "***None of you will ever believe unless you see miracles and wonders.***"

The Setting for our Scripture's distant healing began with the government official going to Jesus in Cana with the intention of asking him to go to Capernaum to heal his dying son. In response, Jesus indicated his impatience with those who demanded miracles. Undeterred, the man plead in verse 49 for Jesus to go heal his son. Then Jesus said to him in **verse 50**, "***Go; your son will live!***" The gospel went on to report, "***The man believed Jesus' words and went.***" He believed and headed home. While he was returning home, his servants met him and said in **verse 51**, "***Your boy is going to live!***" The father asked when he got better and learned it was when Jesus announced the boy's healing.

All three of these gospels have their distant healing story conclude with servants or messengers meeting their master and the glad news of healing being revealed. It should not surprise us then, how the last verse of Luke's distant healing says in **7:10**, "***The messengers went back to the officer's house and found his servant well.***" The last verse of Matthew's distant healing in **8:13**, "***Then Jesus said to the officer, 'Go home, and what you believe will be done for you.' And the officer's servant was healed that very moment.***" After the government official learned from his servant that his son would live, our Reading from John states in the remainder of **verse 53**, "***So he and all his family believed.***"

We also need to trust – believe **Jesus Christ is the Preserver of Life**. We, too, are called to depend on his promises. **The Risen Jesus later asked in John 20:29**, "***Do you believe because you see me? How happy are those who believe without seeing me!***" Today, we do not see the Risen Christ but we still have the testimony of the Scriptures and the Church to enable us to believe without seeing him. Will we live the same kind of faith shown by that father, who trusted Jesus' promise and headed home to see his son healed? Will our lives be preserved because of our faith in the one, who healed the young son from a distance? Will we invite others to trust our Savior's promises and his sufferings for us? **Will we proclaim Jesus Christ is the Preserver of Life? Amen.**