

SERMON UPON MATTHEW VIII. 5-10.

And when Jesus was entered into Capernaum, there came unto him a centurion, beseeching him, and saying, Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously afflicted. And Jesus saith unto him, I will come and heal him. The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof; but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed. For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it. When Jesus heard it, he marvelled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.—MAT. viii. 5-10.

I COME now to the instances of a grown faith, and begin with the faith of the centurion; and that deservedly, for—

1. Christ owneth it as great faith: ver. 10, 'I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel;' that is, a faith so ripe and mature, and that in a military man and an heathen.

2. Because he marvelled at it. In ordinary cases wonder is a fruit of ignorance. When we are ignorant of a thing, or a thing exceedeth our capacity or apprehension, we wonder at it. But this cannot be imagined in Christ, for he knoweth what is in man, and could not be surprised, being the author of this faith. Therefore some interpret it of some external gesture of wondering, which he used to commend the centurion's faith. Why not the passion of wonder itself? for we wonder at things strange and unusual though we be not ignorant of them; and Christ would discover all our sinless infirmities; therefore this showeth it was a remarkable thing. We read that twice Christ wondered; once here, and another time, Mark vi. 6, 'And he marvelled because of their unbelief.'

3. Because he was the first-fruits of the gentiles: ver. 11, 12, 'And I say unto you, that many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into utter darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' This was the first occasion which Christ took to speak of the rejection of the Jews and

the calling of the gentiles. This man was a Roman and an heathen, but it seemeth had gotten some knowledge of the true God and the true religion; and though he were not a proselyte, yet the Jews gave him this testimony, Luke vii. 5, 'He loveth our nation, and hath built us a synagogue;' and indeed we read nothing but well of him. The very errand that brought him to Christ was care of his servant, and looking out for cure for him. Many have no more care of their servants than they have of their horses and oxen; but this man was of another temper, good to the Jews, good in all his relations. Now, that we may profit by this example, let us consider these three things—(1.) What was his faith, and wherein the greatness of it lay; (2.) How this faith was bred and begotten in him; (3.) The effects and fruits of it, or how it discovered itself.

I. The nature of his faith. It was a firm persuasion that all power and authority was eminently in Christ, and that he could do what he pleased. The great end of Christ in all his miracles was to discover himself to be the Son of God, and one in whom the divine nature and power resided; and so by consequence that true Messiah and Saviour of the world. This was Peter's confession of faith: Mat. xvi. 16, 'Thou art Christ, the Son of the living God;' the promised Messiah, the anointed Saviour of the world. And with Peter all the rest of the disciples join: John vi. 69, 'We believe, and are sure, that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.' This the Samaritans, being convinced and converted, confessed also: John iv. 42, 'We know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world.' This Martha acknowledges: John xi. 27, 'She saith unto him, Yea, Lord, I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, that should come into the world.' This was it which the apostles preached: Acts xiii. 23, 'Of this man's seed hath God, according to his promise, raised unto Israel a saviour, Jesus.' This they required of all whom they converted to the christian faith: Acts viii. 37, 'I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.' Now this the centurion cometh off roundly with, being firmly persuaded of a divine power and authority in Christ; for he ascribeth an omnipotency to his word, and reasoneth it out notably: 'Speak but the word, and my servant shall be healed;' ver. 8, 9, 'For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me; and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it.' Here then was the greatness of his faith.

Object. You will say then, All have great faith, for all the christian world professeth this truth that Jesus is the Son of God, papists and protestants, carnal and renewed; the rabble of nominal christians as well as the seriously godly are of this opinion that Jesus is the Son of God and the Saviour of the world.

Ans. 1. *Distingue tempora*—You must distinguish of the times. In that age there was no human reason to believe this truth. Antiquity was against it, and therefore, when Paul preached Jesus, they said, 'He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods,' Acts xvii. 18. Authority was against it: 1 Cor. ii. 8, 'Which none of the princes of this world knew, for had they known it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.' Authority, not only civil, but ecclesiastical, was

against it: Acts iv. 11, 'This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders.' The universal consent of the habitable world was against it; only a small handful of contemptible people owned him: Luke xii. 32, 'Fear not, little flock,' *μικρὸν ποίμνιον*. At that time it was the critical point, the hated truth, that the carpenter's son should be owned as the son of God. Those bleak winds that blow in our backs, and thrust us onward to believe, blew in their faces, and drove them from it; those very reasons which move us to own Christ moved them to reject him. For many ages the name of Christ hath been in request and honour, but then it was a despised way. For men to lay aside their old religion, and temples, and altars, and ceremonies, and rights of worship, for the new way of Jesus of Nazareth, never heard of before, born of a Jewish woman, living in a mean way, crucified like a malefactor, and dead and buried; that he should be owned as the Son of God and the Saviour of the world, what could be to appearance more unreasonable? Alas! what should we have done, if we had been put to encounter with these difficulties and prejudices? And no sooner did any man own this truth, but he was presently exposed to all manner of troubles and persecutions, brought before magistrates, tortured, murdered by all the cruel deaths that could be devised; and all this to be endured upon the hopes of an unseen world. Therefore then it was an undoubted truth: 1 John v. 1, 'Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Son of God is born of God;' and 1 John iv. 2, 'Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God.' Nay, somewhat less than faith and great faith. At his first appearance a certain persuasion, impressed upon the soul by the Spirit of God, of the divine power and all-sufficiency of Christ, so as to repair to him for help, was faith and great faith; when the veil of his human nature and infirmities did not keep the eye of faith from seeing him to have a divine power, though they could not unriddle all the mysteries about his person and office, this was accepted for saving faith.

2. The speculative belief of this truth was not sufficient then, no more than it is now, but the practical improvement. Grant that truth, that Jesus is the Son of God, and other things will follow, as that we must obey his laws, and depend upon his promises, and make use of his power, and trust ourselves in his hands; otherwise the bare acknowledgment was not sufficient. If a man had at that time with some kind of belief owned Christ as the Son of God, and yet could not overcome the shame and fear of the world, he would not have been accepted; for it is said, 1 John v. 5, 'Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God.' Unless that effect followed, the belief was vain. Therefore it is said, John ii. 23-25, 'Many believed in his name when they saw the miracles which he did. But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men, and needed not that any should testify of man, for he knew what was in man.' Christ knew the inside of men, and therefore knew this faith was unlikely to bear any stress, or hold out against temptations. Men might be convinced of some excellency and divine power in Christ, and yet remain unconverted. So Acts viii., Simon Magus believed in Christ, yet remained in the 'gall of bitterness and bond of iniquity.' So we

read again, John viii. 30, 31, 'As he spake these words, many believed on him. Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed.' Some are his disciples in show, not truly and really, being not settled and rooted in the faith. So it is noted, John xii. 42, 43, 'Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but because of the pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.' They had faith, but it was too weak to encounter temptations; they were too tender of their reputation, lest they should be despised, and turned out of their places for deserting the old way wherein they were bred. But none of this can be imputed to our centurion, whose faith Christ approved and rewarded; for in contemplation of this faith the cure was wrought: ver. 13. 'And Jesus said unto the centurion, Go thy way; and as thou hast believed, so be it unto thee.' And he ventureth the credit he had with his nation; and though the particular address concerned not him, but his servant, yet he maketh an open acknowledgment of Christ.

II. How was this faith wrought and bred in him?

I answer—The groundwork was laid in his knowledge of the omnipotency and power of God, and his acquaintance with the scriptures of the Old Testament, though he were not a professed Jew. This prepared for his faith in Christ; the report or hearing was the ground of faith: Isa. liii. 1, 'Who hath believed our report?' He had heard by fame of his excellent doctrine: Mat. vii. 29, 'That he taught as one having authority, and not as the scribes.' And he had heard the rumour of his miracles, more particularly the late instance of curing the leper, which was notorious and public; for Christ biddeth him 'show himself to the priests,' Mat. viii. 4; and also the miracle in recovering the ruler's son, an instance near, which was done in time before this: John iv. 46, 47, 'And there was a certain nobleman, whose son was sick at Capernaum; and he heard that Jesus was come out of Judea into Galilee, and he went unto him, and besought him that he would come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death.' By all which he was moved to ascribe the omnipotency of God, which he knew before, to Jesus Christ. The Spirit of God can bless slender motives to a willing heart; and there is a readiness in holy souls to believe sooner and easier than others: Acts xvii. 11, 'These were more noble than those of Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures whether these things were so or no.' They were not light of belief, for they searched the scriptures; yet they were more ready to believe than perverse and prejudiced persons, *πρόθυμοι*. When there is sufficient evidence, they can hold out no longer. Thus the Spirit of God blessed the knowledge of this centurion, and the rumours that were brought to him of Christ's doctrine and miracles.

III. The effects or fruits of it, or how it discovered itself.

1. In that he applieth himself to Christ. They that believe in Christ will come to him, and put him upon work, whilst others prize his name but neglect his office. A gracious heart will find occasions and opportunities of acquaintance with Christ, if not for themselves yet for others; for when they have heard of him, they cannot keep from him. Faith

never wants an errand to the throne of grace; either necessity brings us thither, or delight. Christ inviteth us to come for what he hath to give: Mat. xi. 28, 'Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.' He is angry that we will not come: John v. 40, 'And ye will not come to me that ye may have life.' If we be backward, he sendeth afflictions upon ourselves and families: Hosea v. 15, 'In their affliction they will seek me early.' Surely it is a delight to him to do his office in helping distressed creatures, or else he would never have taken it upon him. The elect shall be brought to him upon one occasion or another, and he will kindly receive them: John vi. 37, 'All that the Father giveth me shall come to me, and he that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.' An apoplexy fallen on a beloved servant bringeth this centurion to Christ. Well, then, since Christ is 'able to save to the uttermost all that come to God by him,' Heb. vii. 25, let us not neglect the occasions of coming to him, but get nearer to God by repentance and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. Would Christ stoop so low as to take our nature and purchase us with his blood, and be strange to us when we come for the fruits of his purchase and his mercy, to help us and ours?

2. That he accounteth misery an object proper enough for mercy to work upon. The centurion came to him, saying, 'Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented,' ver. 6; that is, grievously affected with the disease. Alas! what can we bring to Christ but sins and sicknesses? Justice seeketh a meet object, for it giveth to every one what is due, but mercy only seeketh a fit occasion. It doth not consider what is deserved, but what is desired and wanted. *Etiā si sim indignus, sum tamen indigens*, saith Romeranius—I am not worthy, but I am needy. The more affected we are with our misery, the fitter for Christ's mercy: Ps. ix. 18, 'The needy shall not always be forgotten.' The more hope we have, the more we are sensible of our need: Ps. xl. 17, 'But I am poor and needy, yet the Lord thinketh upon me.' Faith giveth us this ground of hope, that misery is a motive to God's pity. Though we have nothing within us or without us to commend us to Christ, yet he will not despise the miserable and the needy, and they shall not perish who in the sense of that need repair to him. God bringeth all-sufficiency to the covenant, we bring nothing but all-necessity; as the widow was only to provide empty vessels; the oil failed not till the vessels failed. Christ's bowels yearn towards the distressed.

3. When Christ offereth to come and heal him, ver. 7, 'I will come and heal him' (which was the great condescension of the Son of God to a poor servant), see how the centurion taketh it, ver. 8, 'He answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof.' Humility is a fruit of faith. A sound believer hath an high esteem of Christ and a low esteem of himself, and the one breedeth the other; they see Christ so excellent and themselves so vile, in regard of past sin and present infirmities. What! the Son of God come to the house of an ethnic, and one that hath lived in idolatry and the worship of false gods! The godly are ever acknowledging their vileness and baseness, and indignity and unworthiness, when they have to do with God and Christ: Gen. xviii. 27, 'And Abraham answered, and said,

Behold, now I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes;' 2 Sam. vii. 18, 'Then went David in, and sat before the Lord, and he said, Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my house, that thou hast brought me hitherto?' Gen. xxxii. 10, 'I am not worthy of the least of all thy mercies, and of all the truth which thou hast showed unto thy servant.' So Mat. iii. 11, 'Whose shoes I am not worthy to bear.' So when Christ had let out a beam of his divinity in that great draught of fishes, Peter said, 'Lord, depart from me, for I am a sinful man,' Luke v. 8. The prodigal: Luke xv. 19, 'I am not worthy to be called thy son.' So 1 Cor. xv. 9, 'I am the least of the apostles, and am not meet to be called an apostle.' So though the Jews had said of our centurion, Lord, go to him, for 'he is worthy,' Luke vii. 4: yet he saith of himself, 'Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof.'

Quest. Why are true and sound believers so ready to profess their unworthiness?

Ans. They have a deeper sense of God's majesty and greatness than others have, and also a more broken-hearted sense of their own vile ness by reason of sin. They have a more affective light and sight of things; God is another thing to them than before, so is sin and self. The more unworthy they are in their own apprehension, the more is God and Christ exalted. Faith is an emptying grace, and the best men have lowest thoughts of themselves. A proud man thinketh all things due to him, but an humble man nothing.

4. He is content with Christ's word without his bodily presence: 'Speak but the word, and my servant shall be healed.' God's word is enough to a believer; he doth not limit him to a certain way of working as if there were no way of working but that way only; that is a sign of weakness of faith: Ps. lxxviii. 41, 'They limited the Holy One of Israel.' We are to depend upon him and submit to him, and not prescribe how and when he should help us, nor straiten and confine his power to such or such means. Compare John iv. 47, 48, with this centurion: 'A certain nobleman, whose son was sick at Capernaum' (the town where this centurion was in garrison), he again and again 'besought Jesus that he would come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death. And Jesus said, Except ye see signs and wonders ye will not believe.' The cure must be done in their way: ver. 49, 'The nobleman saith unto him, Sir, come down ere my child die.' Christ refuseth to go to the ruler's house, being twice entreated, but here he offereth to come to visit this poor servant; but the centurion saith, 'Speak but the word;' he was loath to give him this trouble to come to his house; one word will as easily cure him as if he come personally; he doth not tie his virtue to his bodily presence, but ascribeth all to his word. God made the world by a word, sustaineth the world by a word, therefore the centurion only desireth a word. There is a threefold word of God—

[1.] *Verbum scriptum*, his written word, his promise, and that is the food of faith; and a believer can make a feast to himself in the promises when he is seemingly starved in the creature.

[2.] There is *verbum benedictionis*, his word of blessing. So Mat. iv. 4, 'Man liveth not by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.' It is quoted out of Deut. viii. 3. In the

wilderness, where they had neither bread nor water, they were not famished with want, nor compelled to use unlawful means for their relief, God blessed manna. He that provided forty years for such an huge multitude in the desert will not be wanting to his own Son who had fasted but forty days. It is not bread, but the blessing of God that sustaineth us. If they reserved aught of the manna till morning, it putrified and stank; yet the same manna, kept by the commandment of God, was sweet and good in the Ark. God gave his blessing to the one, and not to the other.

[3.] There is *verbum potentiae* the word of his power: 'He spake, and it was done,' Ps. xxxiii. 9. So here the centurion desireth a word. The word made the world, and the word upholdeth it: Heb. i. 3, 'Upholding all things by the word of his power.' The powerful word of God doth all in the world: 'He sendeth forth his commandment upon earth; his word runneth very swiftly,' Ps. cxlvii. 15. So Ps. cvii. 20, 'He sent his word, and healed them;' it is *dictum factum* with God. So 'the word of the Lord tried them.' Ps. cv. 19; that is, his power; there is a powerful commanding word, which is enough.

5. Here is Christ's power and dominion over all events, and events that concern us and ours, fully acknowledged, and that is a great point gained: 'He is Lord both of the dead and living,' Rom. xiv. 9. Health and sickness are at his command. So Isa. xlv. 7, 'I form the light, and create darkness; I make peace, and create evil; I the Lord do all these things.' So Job xxxiv. 29, 'When he giveth quietness, who then can make trouble? and when he hideth his face, who then can behold him? whether it be done against a nation, or against a man only?' Here is a clear confession of Christ's omnipotency and sovereign dominion. This sovereign dominion is backed with omnipotency, and extendeth to all things. To devils: Mark ix. 25, 'I charge thee come out of him, thou dumb and deaf spirit.' To sickness: Luke iv. 39, 'He rebuked the fever, and it left her.' Christ can speak to the leprosy: 'I will; be thou clean,' Mat. viii. 3. To the winds and seas: 'Then he arose, and rebuked the winds and the seas, and there was a great calm,' Mat. viii. 26, 27. To death: 'Lazarus, come forth,' John xi. 43. To nothing, as if it had ears and reason: Rom. iv. 17, 'And calleth those things which are not as though they were.' To the fishes in the sea: Jonah ii. 10, 'The Lord spake to the fish, and it vomited up Jonah upon the dry land.' Thus all creatures have an obediencial ear, to hearken to what God saith, and God can make use of them according to his own pleasure; yea, he can speak to sinners, who are the most stubborn and obstinate pieces of the creation: Ezek. xvi. 6, 'I said unto thee, when thou wast in thy blood, Live;' Eph. v. 14, 'Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.' Every creature is a servant of omnipotency, and doth suspend or exercise its natural operations as God biddeth it. Christ hath this power as God and heir of all things.

[1.] Let us see what is this all-sufficient power and dominion of Christ. It lieth in three things—(1.) A right of making and framing anything as he will, in any manner as it pleaseth him: Jer. xviii. 6, 'Behold, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are ye in mine hand, O house of Israel.' (2.) A right and power of possessing things so made.

all is his; they are rebels that said, Ps. xii. 4, 'Our tongues are our own; who is lord over us?' (3.) A right of using, governing, and disposing of all things so possessed: Mat. xx. 15, 'Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with my own?' whether men or any other creature in the world.

[2.] This dominion and all-sufficient power is a great stay to the souls of true believers, to cause them with comfort to trust themselves and all their affairs in the hands of Christ. We have no reason to doubt of his care, protection, and merciful disposal of us; and if poor, sick, and desolate, you may go to him; it is in the power of his hands to help you. (1.) There is no want, but he can easily supply it: Ps. xxiii. 1, 'The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.' (2.) There is no pain or suffering, but he can easily mitigate or remove it: Mat. viii. 2, 'Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.'

[3.] There is no danger so great from which he is not able to deliver thee: Dan. iii. 17, 18, 'If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king: but if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up;' 2 Cor. i. 10, 'Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver; in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us.' Where can we be so safe as in the love and covenant of such an almighty saviour? Get but this imprinted upon your hearts, and it will beget a strong and steadfast confidence in him.

6. He reasoneth from the strict discipline observed in the Roman armies, where there was no disputing of commands or questioning why and wherefore: 'I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me; and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it,' ver. 9. Where he compareth person with person: I am a man, thou a God; condition with condition, a subordinate officer with Christ the supreme Lord; he knew what it was to obey and to have power over others; power with power, his power over soldiers and servants with Christ's command over all events, health and sickness, life and death. Reasoning for God and his promises is a great advantage. We are naturally acute in reasoning against faith, but when the understanding is quick and ready to invent arguments to encourage faith, it is a good sign.

Use. Go you and do likewise. From the example of the centurion let me encourage you—

1. To readiness of believing: James iii. 17, 'The wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated.' This is opposite to that slowness of heart to believe which we read of, Luke xxiv. 25, 'O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken.' These are more receptive and easy to entertain a doctrine than others: John. vii. 17, 'If any man do his will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God.' The sincere and renewed need less ado to convince them. There is a light credulity: Prov. xiv. 15, 'The simple believeth every word;' and there is the readiness of a sincere mind to embrace the truth. We are to captivate our understandings to the obedience of faith, but not every fancy, lest we be like children, 'tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind

of doctrine,' Eph. iv. 14. No ; a christian must not be like a reed shaken with the wind, nor believe every spirit ; but yet, where the truth is sufficiently evidenced, we must embrace it. Most of our hesitancy in religion comes not so much from the conflict between our light and the doubts of our mind, as from the conflict between our light and lusts, which maketh us irresolute ; but a sincere heart soon overcometh the difficulty.

2. To represent our necessity to Christ, and refer the event to him, to commit and submit all to him. There is an all-sufficiency of power, and infinite pity and goodness, that we need not trouble ourselves about the event. Submission before the event is faith, as after it is patience. This is true faith, in such cases as the centurion came about, to refer all to Christ.

3. To be humble. In all our commerce with Christ, faith must produce a real humility. Faith is most high when the heart is most low : Luke xviii. 11-14, 'The pharisee stood and prayed, saying, God, I thank thee I am not as other men are, &c. I fast twice a week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not so much as lift up his eyes to heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner ! I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other ; for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.' The one challenged a debt, the other begged a favour. Humble supplications to God become us better than proud expostulations.

4. To meditate often on the sovereign dominion of Christ, and his power over all things that fall out in the world. To keep us from warping and running to unlawful shifts, God propoundeth his all-sufficiency to our faith when we enter into covenant with him : Gen. xvii. 1, 'I am the Almighty God ; walk before me, and be thou perfect.' He hath power enough to help, defend, and reward us ; we need not seek elsewhere for a protector or paymaster ; the word of his providence is enough. He can heal our diseases, supply our necessities, or bless a litle, as he did the pulse to the captive children : Dan. i 15, 'Their countenances appeared fairer and fatter in flesh than all the children which did eat the portion of the king's meat.'
