

Surrendered and Amazing
Into the Unknown Week 3: Matt 8:5-13
May 31, 2020

Welcome/intro/vision

Great week to join us if you're new we're starting a brand new series of messages called "Into the Unknown"

With the summer is straight ahead, uncertainty is the word everywhere

 Uncertainty about the Coronavirus, uncertainty about what will happen as the economy opens up and we start mixing up with crowds again

 Parents are uncertain about what to do with the kids this summer

 uncertainty about the economy and jobs

 uncertainty about retirement accounts and vacation plans

 uncertainty about a second wave later this fall

And for some of us the most important question of all: **will there be football in the fall??**

Will we ever get to see the movies some of us were eagerly awaiting? Talk to me

Goose

And will my almost-too-old-for-this kids get their last shot at Halloween fortune and glory this fall?

So many questions, so much uncertainty

 And week one we said that **Uncertainty is not a blank slate but a fog machine** that inhibits our ability to see anything ahead of us

And so the question for all of us is how do we live in light of all the uncertainty?

 What if there are better and worse ways to step into the fog of the next few weeks and next few months?

And what if this season is an opportunity for us to develop and exercise muscles that aren't just useful in a passing crisis

 What if this is an opportunity for us to develop and exercise muscles will serve us long after this crisis has passed by?

If you're new to the Bible or new to faith we're so glad you're here

 throughout the Bible there is story after story of people who are doing what we're doing: staring into a fog of uncertainty and fumbling their way through it as best as they can

 And some of them show us what NOT to do

While other stories show us what it looks like to step into the fog with God in fruitful and life-giving ways

even when walking with God into the unknown leads us into places that are more dangerous and more difficult, not easier

Because sometimes the more difficult and more demanding path draws things out of us that we didn't know was in there but that God has put in us for such a time as this

And so we're looking at some of those stories to see if we can learn what it looks like to walk with God into the unknown

Today, we're going to look at a story that has time and time again my journey with God reminded me of what kind of a heart posture I want to have if I ever grow up

The passage we're going to look at today requires a little bit of historical context

Dropping down into an account of Jesus's life and in Jesus's day Jesus lived in occupied territory

The Romans had come through and steam-rolled much of what we call today Europe and the Middle East and beyond

And of course EVERYONE hated the Romans, including the people of Israel

And many are following Jesus in the hopes that Jesus might be the one to drive out the Romans and give them their nation back

That's the political soup that Jesus is swimming in when a Roman soldier shows up and asks Jesus for a favor as we drop into Matthew 8:5-13

⁵ When Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him, asking for help. ⁶ "Lord," he said, "my servant lies at home paralyzed, suffering terribly."

Always good to see where these things are happening

Here's a map of Israel in Jesus's time and ministry, you can see Capernaum is way up north and not far from Nazareth where he grew up for at least part of his childhood but Capernaum is also called his home town because he spent so much time there

And **here's a picture of Capernaum today**, a beautiful sea-side spot but no longer a functioning town, just a place for pilgrims to come and see where Jesus spent so much of his time and life

In Jesus's day this was a garrison town and a customs station and an administrative center for the occupying forces of the Roman armies

And so as Jesus enters his hometown, a centurion approaches him

Centurions were the backbone of the Roman armies scattered throughout the empire and they had authority over a large number of soldiers

And so this guy is an occupying ROMAN military commander with authority over the military that is currently occupying Jesus's hometown

He's the leader of the bullies who maintain Roman rule and law and discipline

And in this little section of Scripture you've got a number of explosive things happening

First, there's **the Karate Kid factor**: remember, the Karate Kid story started with the new kid getting bullied in high school by the mean kids from the local karate dojo

If you've ever had a Karate Kid kind of an experience where you were bullied or threatened in some way--terrible boss, abusive family member, a bully at school growing up, someone who's hurt you in intentional ways

Then you've maybe had fantasies of Mr. Miagi training you for revenge, waxing on and waxing off

Until **the ultimate moment where** you come face to face with them and the bully gets what's coming to them

And maybe you've even imagined a time when the person who's bullying or threatening you needs your help and you have the upper hand

In your imagination, what did you do when the person came pleading to you for help? You squashed them like a grape with great joy!

In Jesus's day, there were many who were imagining a day when the occupying Romans might come to them pleading for help

and they looked forward with great relish to the idea that they might use that power to heap shame upon them just as the Romans regularly heaped shame on those that they over-ran

So there's the bully needs my help dynamic--but because it's the first century in ancient Palestine there are what we would call today racial or ethnic components as well

And one thing you'll pick up on if you hang around here long enough is that both Jaime and I regularly talk about the racial or ethnic issues in the Bible

to the first readers, this is not just a military occupying force asking the conquered for help, it's a Gentile approaching a Jew asking for help--this has ethnic or racial levels to it

We try to unpack those whenever it happens in the Scriptures and that's not some liberal agenda or political agenda, here's why we do this

The Bible is a big, thick book written over thousands of years with dozens and dozens of different writers

But starting on about page 7, in Genesis chapter 11, there is a story called the Tower of Babel, in which God famously scatters people essentially into different ethnic groups

And THEN, in the very next chapter, Genesis 12, we get God's plan is to RE-GATHER all those ethnic groups that he just scattered

One way to look at the whole story-line of the Bible from page 8 to the end is how God is going to solve the problem of the brokenness between both people and God AND people and each other along ethnic and racial lines in particular

Until FINALLY the picture we get at the very end of the Bible is people of every tribe, nation, and tongue worshipping God together

The Bible is saturated with racial and ethnic tensions and issues and with wisdom on how to overcome those issues

AND at just the right time, God sends his Son who unleashes a spiritual power and authority that is strong enough to heal the brokenness along racial lines

This isn't a side-note of the Bible, it's one of the main story lines! This was a biblical agenda before it was anyone's political agenda.

But here's the problem, most of us who grew up in predominantly white churches have no idea No one ever told us that the story of the Bible is God reconciling division along racial and ethnic lines

AND no one's told us that there's a serious call to be people who are agents and instruments of reconciliation

And because no one's taught us all this, predominantly white church communities in our country have been regularly flat-footed and behind when it comes to dealing with the racial issues in our culture

Whether it's ANOTHER awful horrific death of an unarmed black man or the ways that COVID-19 deaths have played out drastically differently according to zip codes

Racial and ethnic tension and brokenness and sin is arguably the single greatest problem in our country from just about day one of our history

So when we talk about this from the Scriptures, it's not a side-note or a distraction-

This is one of the most dominant themes of the Bible AND it's one of the most dominant problems in American history

And so as we walk through the Scriptures, we're going to do our best to equip all of us to see how these stories and this whole book is saturated with racial and ethnic tensions and wisdom

And most importantly, to see what God's desire and heart is and what it means to step into the unknown aligned with God's heart and God's actions

And in fact I would argue that one of the reasons for the rise of the political left's strong advocacy along racial lines is because the church didn't do our job

We should have been the ones fighting for reconciliation and healing and repair and repentance along racial lines

We didn't, we left a vacuum and the result is the political left has stepped in to attempt to fill it with political and legislative solutions that are important but not enough, there's not the spiritual power that God has made available to us in the Holy Spirit.

And so today we join with people all over the world praying for George Floyd's family, for his whole community.

And we lament that this is not a one-off event but a part of a much, much larger pattern that stretches back to the birth of our nation and has plagued our land from the beginning

And we pray that this racial brokenness plague would end

AND that we might be a part of it in whatever way God would lead us—that we would be a reconciled community and people who are all about reconciliation

That God's kingdom would come, God's will would be done along racial lines in America as it is in heaven

This story of Jesus and the centurion is loaded up with all sorts of dynamics

There's the Roman military commander, who is the representative of the bully and there's Jesus, who represents the bullied people

But there's also this racial and ethnic and nationalistic angle:

the hated Roman asking the Jew for help, something your average Jew of Jesus's day would have found great delight in milking for all it was worth

And then there's the simple humanity of it all—someone he cares about is very sick, an unwelcomed plunge into the unknown

Have you ever plunged into that particular unknown?

Ever been in a situation where the problems you're facing compels you to reach out for help to people that you'd otherwise never approach, never would have talked to?

Our first kid was born 3 ½ weeks early and he just wasn't quite fully cooked yet. And he struggled to eat or sleep for the first few weeks

And when you've got a kid with issues like that you find yourself in all sorts of professional offices that you never even knew existed, doing anything you can to help that kid

Only in this instance, this man's desperation compels him to the radical step of asking for help from someone who he has no earthly business asking help from

He's not exactly a good religious type from the perspective of the Jewish religious types

And for some of you, that's the best news you've heard all of COVID-19

If you've got problems but you're not especially a praying kind of person and you're not sure if God wants to hear from you, and you've maybe got all kinds of reasons why you think Jesus wouldn't want to help you--this story is especially good news for you

Jesus has no earthly business helping this guy, either, but watch what he does.

⁷ Jesus said to him, "Shall I come and heal him?"

⁸ The centurion replied, "Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed. ⁹ For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and that one, 'Come,' and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it."

¹⁰ When Jesus heard this, he was amazed and said to those following him, "Truly I tell you, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith...."

And then Jesus launches into a very brief but very pointed aside that is again racially and ethnically charged that we don't have time unfortunately to cover, that'll be some other message

And here's how this story ends:

¹³ Then Jesus said to the centurion, "Go! Let it be done just as you believed it would." And his servant was healed at that moment.

Many years ago now I was at a leadership conference where I heard **General Colin Powell interviewed**

If you're not familiar with Powell, he was a four-star general and the secretary of state back under George W. Bush in the early 2000's

And he's retired but he's still a highly respected public figure

in fact as I was doing a little research and back in the 2016 election, he received 3 electoral college votes—who knew?!?

At any rate he was being interviewed about leadership and he was talking about the true source of power and authority for a leader

and of course as a 4-star general and secretary of state he was in charge a lot

"But" he said, "I never, ever, ever finished a conversation with the line 'that's an order' like you see in the movies.

Because if you have to tell someone 'that's an order,' you're not really in charge. You only have positional authority that's not genuine authority

Genuine authority comes through the respect you earn by building relationships and by conducting yourself with integrity."

The whole auditorium exploded in applause—it brought the house down, everyone was amazed

In this story, this man's faith AMAZES the Son of God—can you imagine! Jesus being AMAZED by someone? It's because he's totally AMAZING!

Jesus offers to come to his place and heal the servant

And the centurion says, "Don't bother. I know how this works. I know that you're in charge.

And I know how in charge works because I, too, am someone who is under people in charge and I have people under me that I'm in charge of

And when I say go, he goes and when I say come here, they come and when I say do this, they do it

And I know it's the same way with you, just say the word and it'll happen

The centurion is able to connect the dots between his lower-case a authority and Jesus's capital A-Authority.

He says: if I tell someone under my command to do something, they do it. It's the same way with you, only more so—I trust that, I believe that, I don't doubt it.

And Jesus says, "WOW! I've never seen anything like this."

When the Son of God is impressed with you, you know you're pretty awesome! This is one of Jesus's most emphatic celebrations of someone that we have recorded in the Scriptures.

Very few of us step into the unknown feeling amazing. The unknown has a way of disorienting us a bit. But how do we become amazing as we step into the unknown?

Maybe we do what the centurion does here—and it starts with this
The centurion is first **AWAKE**²:

1. To the people around him (not overwhelmed nor in denial/ignoring).

This past week we had a meeting that went late into the night and the next day I was sort of sleep walking through my day

And the result was I kept forgetting things around the house with the kids that I usually take care of. All day long I kept having to apologize for the ways that in my sleep-walking I was just doing my own thing, not attending to the people around me.

The centurion is awake to the challenges and responsibilities of the people and situations around him in a way that leads to compassionate engagement and getting help

One thing that happens to us most naturally when we step into the fog of the unknown is we become extremely self-absorbed: what am I doing with MY kids, with MY summer vacation, with MY job situation

All important questions and for many of us our lives and situations do need deliberate tending to

but at some point, eventually, we have to turn our eyes around us to tend to the people around us—family, friends, co-workers, people who are suffering outside our typical circles

And for those of us who are Jesus-followers that call includes a call to be awake to the issues of racial brokenness and the cries of the people around us

Part one of why the Centurion is AMAZING is he's not just self-absorbed in the fog, he cares about someone else's suffering—even someone that in the first century would have been considered property and whose suffering did not matter

But he's awake to the people around him. And that moves him in compassion to get him help

2. But he's also awake **To Jesus** who is an unlikely source of healing from a typical Roman centurion perspective

He's willing to be the bridge between the problems around him and the power of Jesus made available to him by asking

When I was in my 20's I had a bout with some light depression, nothing as heavy as many people struggle with but it seemed to go on forever.

And a good friend of mine at one point prayed over me the good news that Jesus had authority over all the chemicals in my brain, and he asked that Jesus put the back into balance

And that prayer was something I came back to over and over again—my friend was awake to my problem and to Jesus's authority in a way that I couldn't be

And in his prayer, he built a bridge between my problem and the truth of Jesus's authority, and I walked across it in prayer over and over again until eventually it lifted

Throughout the Scriptures, human beings are described as needing to come awake in order to fully live. That we're all born in spiritually in a slumber and there's a call to awakening to both God and to the people around us

Here's a great picture of what it means to be awake²

From an earthly perspective in the first century the Roman cares about someone he has no business caring about and it drives him to talk to someone he has no business talking to

Awake² + Boldly Submitted to Jesus's AUTHORITY but **(not small or passive)**

Submission is a verb—you submit a payment, you submit a ticket request, you submit your opinion

In the scriptures, submission is always about movement, it doesn't mean small or insignificant or passive and it doesn't mean self-hating and or self-loathing

When we approach God the way he designed us to we grow when we bow

we are more alive when we're surrendered to his glory, we're more our true selves when we're submitted to Jesus's authority

Prayer when we're awake and submitted is warfare, it's work.

And sometimes being submitted means that we get a clear signal from Jesus that there are further steps we need to take, subsequent action is called for in order to deliver on this work

We can be submitted but not small---in fact, we see the fruit and result of this man's submission which is this:

Awake² + Boldly Submitted = Amazing in the Unknown (not arrogant or self-righteous). You can be amazing and not full of yourself. You can be amazing and surrendered and submitted and wonderful all at the same time.

And you don't get to be amazing by declaring yourself to be amazing

you get to be amazing by repeated practice of being awake to the people and problems around you, awake to Jesus who is near you, and by being submitted and surrendered to his power and authority--amazing comes as the fruit of that

In fact, I want to suggest to you that why he's amazing is that he's doing what God designed human beings to do in the very beginning of time

Way back in Genesis, God makes everything good and beautiful and perfect and then he makes human beings in his image

And he gives them a job to do: God says "I'm going to give YOU, human beings, AUTHORITY, under my authority, to tend to this beautiful and perfect place and make it even more beautiful, more perfect

And once sin enters this world we forget who we are and why we're here

And we neglect or forget this role as the beings put here to be the ones who stand between the needs of this world around us and the God who is over us

And so what God does is he puts on flesh and re-claims that spot in the cosmos on our behalf—he's the PERFECT image-bearer, showing us what it means to be fully human, doing what a fully human being should be doing

And Jesus walks around everywhere he goes there's life in his wake, he's got dominion and authority over everything and he uses that for good, for healing, for renewal, for restoration

And what this centurion is doing is coming to the truest image-bearer who ever lived and taking up his rightful and good place in the cosmos just underneath him, submitted and surrendered to him

And he says, "here's something that's broken in the world that I long to see made beautiful and whole again, I know you can do it—you have the power and authority, will you do it?"

When you and I participate in that great project fully awake and owning what's in your sphere of responsibility or relationships to own

And then when you go to work in bringing that to Jesus in prayer and then sometimes taking additional steps that God requires or asks of us

But always fully SUBMITTED to and SURRENDERED to the authority of Jesus as Lord over the cosmos and over the fog and uncertainty

The result is this incredibly wonderful and complex thing: Jesus responds, Jesus incorporates this request into the work of restoration that Jesus has come to do

Everywhere Jesus goes there is life in his wake—and very often, that life is the direct result of the request or actions of an image-bearer who ask him

Healing the servant wasn't on Jesus's agenda that day until the centurion approached him and asked him to do it. And in response, Jesus put it on his agenda.

Because when we pray to Jesus in full submission to God, we're taking our rightful place in the cosmos before a God that Jesus shows us is good and eager to bring blessing

The result in this case and in millions of cases throughout Christian history is human beings who are absolutely amazing people

People through whom life is flowing, Jesus described it as streams of living water flowing through us to bless a world in need

To bring hope and healing into the unknown

Today's Take-W.I.T.H.

How do we press into the unknown and come out amazing?

Awake²

This week, can you look around you **to the threats to and the problems of the people and situations around you**—not self-absorbed, not ignoring, but not overwhelmed either; family, friends, co-workers, the racial brokenness all around us

And can you fight to be awake **to Jesus** who has all authority and power over all situations forever and ever amen

+ **Boldly Submitted**—can you then bring that clear, simple articulation to Jesus and name him as king and Lord over whatever that situation is and ask him to move in it?

That's one of the ways we're invited into prayer

And if we can practice this over and over again, the result that's been born out over the centuries is people who are amazing into and through and on the other side of the unknown

This morning we're going to try something a little bit different—we want to as much as possible make this experience something that's more than just watching a screen but something that you're really engaging with

So I'm going to close with a question and we're going to give you just a couple minutes to discuss it with either the people that you're watching this with at home

OR if you're home alone or watching alone, we want to invite you to text your answer to a trusted friend or you can pop it up in the chat

Just two minutes, here's the discussion question: **“Which of these three feels hardest?”**

Are you struggling to be awake to the needs around you because you've just got so much uncertainty in your own life or you feel overwhelmed by what's out there?

Are you struggling to be awake to Jesus who is always nearby, but the fog is too thick and there's too much going on?

Or are you struggling to submit, to surrender, to believe his authority is good news for you and to walk under the umbrella of his authority?

What might help you to do it?

If you look back over the past 100 years or so, the people and the places where Christianity is most readily and easily taken root is often in sub-cultures where people understand and embrace structures and hierarchies more easily

The military, for example, like this Roman Centurion. Or athletics—there's a whole parachurch ministry called Fellowship of Christian Athletes and in athletics you understand the authority of the coach

And the places where Christianity has had a harder time taking root is places that are resistant or hostile or suspicious of or downright set against hierarchies and structures

Artistic temperaments, for example, even though some of the greatest artists especially musicians have been Christ-followers, artists tend to be less inclined by disposition to

Now remember, all Jesus's core followers are Jewish and Jesus is Jewish

these are people of Israel that Jesus is talking to, and he's saying I haven't found anyone IN ISRAEL among our own people who have this kind of faith

Here again is a passage where ethnicity and race is playing a part

AND THEN Jesus goes on to give a very sober-minded warning to his own people who all think that they're automatically God's people by virtue of their nationality, by virtue of being Jewish

And Jesus is going to say that nationality or ethnic group is not how anyone is going to be a part of what God's up to

Entrance to and participation in God's kingdom is not ultimately about your ethnic heritage but