



Shaped to Serve

Sunday, February 12, 2017

Centurion: The Roman Convert

Some Background

The political world of the Gospels was a world of occupied lands. The areas where Jesus lived and worked were all under the control of the Roman Empire. Although the local political organizations of most areas were preserved under occupation, the Roman government—namely, Caesar—typically sent a king, governor, or another political figure to keep things in order. Power struggles between Jewish and Roman authorities form the backdrop to Jesus' encounters with the people he met in ministry; they're also the main reason a guy like the centurion mattered at all.

A centurion was kind of like a professional officer in the Roman army, a breed of officers who earned a reputation for dealing out harsh punishments to anyone who stood in their way. Since they were held personally responsible for mishaps and mistakes, centurions were ruthless warriors. They made a habit of instilling fear in people, keeping them down, even killing if it meant they could preserve order and maintain law.

Although centurions generally had a bad rep in the places they worked, their job was a serious one. Most centurions commanded a legion of around 100 men and would fight alongside these legions in battle—often taking a position at the front of the line to show courage and inspire their men. The life of a centurion occupying a city wasn't much easier. These centurions may have had a break from battle, but they were still far away from their homes and surrounded by people who found them suspicious at best and loathsome at worst. Read the gospels lessons below to find out about their role in Jesus' life and earthly ministry.

Youth Mindset: Young people are trying to make sense of the world around them and learning to question previously accepted beliefs. They're wrestling with perception vs. reality in social, education, and political structures. Just like the centurion, they have a lot to think about.

Teacher Homework: Read some key passages about various centurions during Jesus ministry: Luke 2:1-7, 3:14, 13:1-3 / Matthew 8:5-13, Luke 7:1-10 / Matthew 27:27-31, Mark 15:16-20 / Matthew 27:54,66, Mark 15:39,44-45, Luke 23:47.

Opening Activity

Write the word *power* on the whiteboard. Give students one minute to name as many synonyms as possible, writing down the words as they are yelled out. After a minute, look at the words and designate each as a positive or negative connotation for the word *power*.

Watch the Video

Show the video: “Centurion: The Roman Convert.”

- How do you feel about the video you just watched? What surprised you?
- If you were the centurion, would you have been curious about Jesus? Skeptical about him? Why? If you could talk to the centurion, what would you say?

In the Bible

Recall the previous activity on the word power. Divide into two groups. One group will read Matthew 8:5-13 (Jesus heals the Centurion’s Servant) and the other group will read Mark 15:16-20 (Soldiers Taunt Jesus). Have groups talk about how power was being used in their verses.

- How did the soldiers show their power? How did Jesus show his power?
- Why might it take greater power to show kindness or take abuse than to knock other people around?
- What does it mean that Jesus recruited people who were capable of doubt? Does doubting lessen someone’s authority or power?

Tweet it Out

Recall the various moments from the video and the Gospels. Write a Twitter post (140 characters or less) as if you were the centurion from the video, telling the world about what just happened as you were doing your job and Jesus showed up. Do this in small groups. Share these four moments with the larger group after writing about each.

1. Jesus’ family show up to be counted in Bethlehem.
2. Jesus heals the centurion’s servant.
3. Soldiers taunt Jesus.
4. At the cross and the tomb.

Closing Ritual

Share in “highs and lows” from the week. Close in prayer.

Take-Home Question

If you were the centurion and had a chance to sit down and talk with Jesus over a slice of pizza, what would Jesus say to you about everything that just happened? For fun, what kind of pizza would you two order?