

**What Kind of Man Is This? The Lord of the Gears**  
**From the Series, “The King and I – Matthew Tells Us About the King of the Universe”**  
**By Phil Brainerd**  
**Presented to Trinity Church of Teaneck, NJ**  
**On Date - Sunday, July 25, 2021**

**Introduction**

We’re going to start our discussion today with a common machine that millions of American families have in their kitchens - A microwave oven.

“What does a microwave oven have to do with anything?”, you ask. And as always, I’m glad you asked.

A microwave oven is a surprisingly complicated piece of machinery. Here’s an interesting fact: They were discovered by accident. Years ago, scientists invented radar. An engineer who worked on early radar noticed that things were melting if they were too close to the equipment. He discovered this because a chocolate bar in his pocket melted. I’m guessing that this was a cue to this engineer to keep some distance. If his chocolate bar melted, I can only imagine what the microwaves were doing to him! Anyway, scientists started looking into ways that this equipment could be adapted to cook things.



From there, we’ve learned how to get exactly the best frequency of magnetic waves to cook food. We’ve learned the best materials to keep those waves focused on food and not on us. We’ve learned how to add little turntables that rotate the food at just the right speed and all kinds of other controls. We’ve learned a whole lot about microwaves.

And you know what? Most of us don’t care about all that. And we shouldn’t. Do you know what we care about? Popcorn. We care about the fact that a good microwave oven has one button with the word “popcorn” on it. When you put a little pre-packed bag of kernels into the oven and press that button, magic happens. When you have that little button, you don’t need to know the exact wattage or the exact speed of the turntable, or the perfect amount of time. You just need to be hungry and be in the mood for popcorn.

Would you like to learn a good 25-cent word? The word is “Abstraction”. You don’t have to remember it unless you want to go into the computer and engineering fields. For our purposes, abstraction simply means that one **simple** thing represents other, **complicated** things. For machines: One easy to understand command makes multiple, complicated things happen. In this case, it’s how one button on the microwave makes all kinds of complicated things happen. We’re going to learn today that this principle is surprisingly important if we are to understand how to relate to God.

We're in our series, "The King and I – Matthew Tells Us About the King of the Universe." In our last session, we started a new sub-series with the title, "What Kind of Man Is This?" In that lesson we learned that Jesus is the Lord of Life: Biological Life. This week, we're going to learn that Jesus is the Lord of the Machine

What does that mean? Let's find out.

## I. Jesus Meets a Centurion

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."  
(Matthew 8:5-6)

In the days of Jesus, Capernaum was a thriving city on the northwest shore of the sea of Galilee. I say "In the days of Jesus" because today all that is left of the city is ruins. We'll learn why a thriving city became ruins in Matthew 11. At the time though, it was a very nice place to live. The apostle Peter had his home there, as was likely the case with other fishermen who participated in the thriving fishing industry of that region.

Also, this was not far from the mountainside where Jesus presented his manifesto. Jesus and his friends were intending to spend some time in Peter's home, so after coming down from the mountainside, they headed to this shore community. Recall that when Jesus had finished his presentation, large crowds followed him.

As he walked along, he was met by a Centurion. A Roman centurion was a commander of large groups of soldiers. The word means "commander of a hundred", but technically, the number was 80.

There were several ways to become a centurion. You could start out as a foot soldier and work your way up by acts of courage and commitment. If that was the case, you could come from just about anywhere. You could be Syrian or Greek or Egyptian. Or you could start in this role if you were the son of a wealthy Roman citizen. Centurion was the highest rank you could achieve if you were a commoner. It was the lowest you could enter if you were a member of the privileged class.

One way or the other, there was one important thing about a Centurion: No faithful Jew would ever become one. That's because the Romans were invaders and oppressors. So, it's surprising, very surprising, that any Roman soldier of any high rank would come to ask the help of a Jewish Rabbi. These men, Centurions and other Roman soldiers would normally be hated by the Jewish people.

But this Centurion was different - Very different. How so?

**He was humble.**

When Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him, asking for help.  
(Matthew 8:5)

This man was humble. He came asking for help. Roman soldiers were proud and self-sufficient. The Roman army was the mightiest in the known world. They were the winners in all conflicts. Those whom they conquered were the losers.

If a Roman was sick, there were Roman and Greek doctors. We'll learn in moment that the Centurion was a wealthy man. If he wanted the best physicians, he could afford them. But instead, he humbled himself by asking a Jewish Rabbi, a resident of a conquered nation, for help.

**He shows unusual appreciation for the Jewish people.**

Further, this man had an unusual appreciation for the Jewish people. I mentioned a moment ago that he was wealthy. Here's how we know that: Luke tells this same story in his Gospel. In his telling, the Centurion has some friends among the Jewish people who help him. Here's what they said:

"This man deserves to have you do this, 5 because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue. (Luke 7:4-5)"

Imagine this: The Centurion might be a Roman. He might be a Syrian or a Greek or an Egyptian. But he loves the Jewish people so much that he helped the ones who lived in his community to build their synagogue. In fact, they say that he built it. This man, even though he was not raised as a Jew, loved the Jewish nation and the Jewish faith.

This is particularly unusual because soldiers of his rank were often trying to better themselves in the Roman Empire. The Romans loved Roman religion and wanted all their subjects to practice it. Now, they loved money and power more. They were smart enough to realize that, if they forced all the subject states to practice Roman religion, that they would see numerous revolts. So, they made a provision in their laws that allowed each nation to keep their religion. Other religions were tolerated. But loyal Roman soldiers would be expected to encourage locals towards the Roman system of faith.

So, encouraging the Jewish faith by building a synagogue might be putting this man and his career at great risk. There was something different about this man that caused him to do this.

### **He shows unusual respect for Jesus.**

Next, the Centurion showed unusual respect for Jesus. In our last session, we met a leper who referred to Jesus as “Lord”. We said at that time that the title “Lord” was at least an acknowledgement of a big difference in status. Someone who considered themselves of low status would address someone of higher status as “Lord”. Someone of high status would only use the word when they addressed someone of great status.

“Lord” is how the Centurion addressed Jesus. Not “Friend.” Certainly not “Buddy”. This man had an unusual respect for Jesus. He recognized that Jesus was a man of great authority. And the word may mean something more: “Lord” was a word used for deity.

### **He had a heart.**

Next, we see the reason that this man felt the need to come to Jesus: He had a servant who was very sick. It says here that the servant was paralyzed and in great pain. The translators of the NIV have used the word “servant” here. That might be generous. Today, we think of a “servant” as someone who is paid to serve. This is the ancient Roman empire. As such, this man was likely a slave. Slaves were looked down upon in Greek and Roman culture. One Roman writer of the day said that farm animals and slaves were essentially the same thing - The only difference was that a slave could talk.

This centurion, however, was different. ***He had a heart.*** He recognized the humanity of his slave. He cared about him. He cared that his slave was suffering.

So, this centurion was different in a lot of ways. He’s different in even more ways, which we’ll get to in a few minutes. For now, let’s stop here and move on in the story.

## **II. The Reaction of Jesus**

Let’s look at the way that Jesus reacted to this very special man.

Jesus said to him, “Shall I come and heal him?” (Matthew 8:7)

Jesus responds to this man’s request by acknowledging that he can help. Now, there’s something interesting here for the Greek scholars: Matthew uses an unusual sentence structure here. Sometimes translators will pass over small details of language to present the main idea of a sentence. In this case, if the translators were being very precise, they might have translated this as, “Shall I ***myself*** come and heal him?” So, there’s an emphasis here: Jesus is saying, “Do you want ME to come and heal him?”

Here is where we see just how different this Centurion is. Remember, a Centurion is a man of status. He has at least 80 soldiers who answer to him. And along with that status, this man has wealth.

Now let's look at this from a different angle. Also remember, Jesus has just come down from his highly successful presentation on the mountainside. He has a big crowd following him. He's clearly on the way to a destination.

Here's how a man of wealth and status might have responded to this question: "Why, yes, of course you yourself should come. I will not settle for someone else – an underling. Forget about where you were going. Surely it can wait. Forget about the crowds. I am a Centurion of the army of the Roman Empire. I'm important – more important than they are. So, yes, of course, come right now."

### **III. The Centurion Replies to Jesus**

Is that how the Centurion reacts? Let's read.

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." (Matthew 8:8-9)

Wow! Let's take this apart.

#### **Even More Humility**

"Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof."

In Jewish culture, there was a rule: No faithful Jew could enter the house of a Gentile, because Gentiles did all kinds of things that might cause defilement. They might have eaten pork a few hours before, and maybe some pieces fell the floor where they could touch your feet. Now, this man could have said, "OK. I know you Jews have this rule where you don't normally come under a Gentile's roof - But maybe we can work something out."

That's not what he says. He says, "I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. We said a few moments ago that this man was humble. Now we're seen that quality multiplied many times over.

**This statement shows great faith.**

“But just say the word, and my servant will be healed.”

The Centurion had complete confidence that Jesus could heal his servant. He was so confident of Jesus, that Jesus didn't even need to be present when the healing took place. He could stand anywhere, any distance from the servant, and merely speak.

You know what makes this even more amazing? We, who are reading the story, don't know what's causing his servant's pain. In our last session, we met a man with leprosy. Jesus healed him in an instant. When we read that story, we talked about what it would take to do that.

- You would have to know the location of every single one of the 30 trillion cells in the man's body.
- You would have to eliminate the microbe that's causing the disease without hurting any of the good cells.
- You would then have to rebuild everything using the DNA buried in the man's genetic structure.

But that's assuming all you know that the man's condition is Leprosy, and that it is Leprosy is caused by a specific microbe. In the case of the Centurion's servant, there could be lots of things causing this man's condition.

- Maybe it was multiple sclerosis?
- Maybe it was a stroke?
- Or maybe a brain tumor?
- Or a genetic disorder?
- Or Tetanus?
- Or an aneurysm?

If you called a doctor today and told them you were in pain and couldn't move, do you know the first thing the doctor would say? He or she would say **they need to see you**. They would need to hook up machines and take some blood. Then, maybe they could make a diagnosis.

This man, this Centurion, had unusual faith. He knew that Jesus wouldn't need any of that.

### **The Centurion's Reason**

Now we come to one of the most important parts of this story. We're about to see what makes this man completely different than any we've met so far, and any we will meet in Matthew's book. The Centurion going to describe the reason for his faith. He will explain how he sees the world and the universe.

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. (Matthew 8:9)

The Roman army was like a well-oiled machine. Instead of gears, it had people. Each person had a function and a place. Remember Jesus said, "Should I myself come...?" The Centurion says, "Well, I myself am a man who is under authority." In other words: "I am a man who is part of a machine." He then goes on to describe how the machine worked. Someone gives a command, and people do exactly as they are told - They fulfill their mission.

Any good soldier in the army knows the saying: "When your commander says jump, you don't ask 'why?' You ask how high!"

This man is saying that to him, the universe is like such a machine. He doesn't understand every piece of it. He only understands one thing: ***Jesus is the one who runs the machine.***

So, the Centurion didn't need to know what caused his servant's pain. He knew that Jesus didn't even have to be there. All he needed to understand was this: ***Jesus is the Lord of the machine that's called the universe.***

In modern language, this man might have said, "Jesus, the world is like a big microwave oven." "You, Jesus, just have to push the 'popcorn' button, and all the pieces will work together to give you exactly what you command.

That's amazing! Absolutely amazing!

This man had great understanding. And he had great faith. How did he get these things? No one knows.

How did Jesus react to this statement?

#### **IV. A very unusual reaction from Jesus**

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." (Matthew 8:10)

Jesus was amazed. Friends, that's not easy to do. Understand, Jesus has followers. He's even chosen some of his apostles - People like Peter and Andrew; James and John. None of these people caused Jesus to be amazed.

Jesus will now go on and say one of the things that would later get him into trouble:

11 I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. 12 But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (Matthew 8:11-12)

There were many in the days of Jesus who understood the Jewish faith well. They were the ones who followed Jesus when he called them. As we as learned in our study of Mathew's book though, there were many who did not understand the Jewish faith well.

One aspect of the Jewish faith was that it was aimed initially at people who were descended from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The children of Israel had, and still have, a special place in God's plan. However, that faith was always intended for the rest of the world as well. Here's what God said to Abraham, centuries before the time of Christ:

2 "I will make you into a great nation,  
and I will bless you;  
I will make your name great,  
and you will be a blessing.  
3 I will bless those who bless you,  
and whoever curses you I will curse;  
and all peoples on earth  
will be blessed through you."  
(Genesis 12:2-3)

God promised that he would make Abraham great - But not just so that Abraham could enjoy power and wealth. **God intended to use Abraham and his family to bless everyone on the earth.** The true believers among the children of Israel understood this. As we said, there were those who didn't. They believed that one day, there would be a great feast. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob would be there. Along with those men would be everyone who was descended from them. Anyone not descended from these men would be excluded. What was the fate of all those people? No one was sure, and no one cared. All that was important was that the descendants of Abraham were the only ones at the party.

In particular, people like Roman soldiers would surely be excluded.

To the people who believed that only Jews would be at the great feast, Jesus said, "You might be surprised." Jesus said that people from all over the world will be at that feast. You know who won't be there? Many who by right should have been - Many who by lineage might have been "Subjects of the Kingdom." However, those people were eliminated by their hard hearts. And when they are excluded, it will not be pleasant.

Jesus gives us a vitally important principle here: Having the right lineage doesn't get you into the kingdom of heaven. Having the right parents and the right family doesn't get you in. ***Having the right heart gets you in.***

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. (Matthew 8:13)

This Centurion, this very unusual man, a foreigner, received what he requested. His servant was healed. The healing was clearly supernatural. It was an act of great power. It was immediate.

## **V. Application**

What does this mean for us today? We need to remember some of the things that made this man special.

### **Pride vs. Humility**

First, he was humble. Most citizens of the Roman Empire believed that they were better than others. The Romans were the winners, and they deserved to be. The conquered nations, like Israel, were losers. Then, Jesus was surrounded by members of his own faith who didn't understand how it worked. The faith given to Abraham was meant eventually for the whole world. But some of those who lived in the nation of Israel didn't understand that.

So on the one hand, you had Romans who thought they were better than others - Not all, but many. Then you had Jews who thought they were better than others - Again, not all, but many.

This man, the Centurion, was not like any of those. He was humble.

Here, we need to ask a hard question: How do we think of ourselves? Do we believe that we better than others? We're all trained to believe that such attitudes are wrong - But they have a way of hiding inside of us. One way this bad attitude comes out is when we become angry that we don't get what we want. Perhaps it's the woman who's angry that her sister is the pretty one. Perhaps it's the man who's angry that his brother is smarter. Perhaps it's the person who's angry that their neighbor has more things - A better job, a bigger home. I could go on forever listing all the ways that people become angry when they feel that someone else has more.

It may not show on the surface, but sometimes people have a fist shaking in the face God. Their hearts quietly cry out, "I deserve better!" Sometimes this keeps people from church. At other times, people still come. They'll sit in the pews and sing the songs. But quietly, the fist is still clenched.

When Jesus asked the Centurion if he should come and heal his servant, this man sincerely said, "I do not deserve to have you come under my roof." No shaking fist. No demands. Because he was humble.

### **How the Universe Works**

Next, this man had insight into how the universe works. It's a big machine. Only the Creator knows all the pieces. Some are visible, others invisible. All parts are wonderful. The Centurion understood two important things:

1. The Universe is a big machine.
2. Jesus is the one who controls it.

The Centurion didn't need to know anything about how the machine is constructed or how it works. ***He knew that all he had to do was ask for help.***

### **Our Place in the Machine**

Finally, the Centurion knew one more important thing. He said, "I am a man under authority." In other words, the Roman army was a big machine. This man knew his place in it. He was part of the machine. If he was given an order, it would be carried out.

Friends, the Universe is a big machine. You have a place in it, if you are willing. To have that place, you must be willing to recognize that you, too, are under authority. When God commands, do you obey? Or, when God calls to you, is he met with a fist?

Let's pull this all together.

### **Conclusion**

Today we've met a man who was very special. He was humble. He understood the nature of the universe. It's a big machine, with Jesus sitting at the controls. This man knew that he had a place in that machine. Because of all this, and more, Jesus looked at the Centurion and reacted in a way unlike any other during his earthly ministry: He was amazed.

It's time for a tough question: When Jesus looks at you, is he amazed? If you think not, do you know what you need to do?

***- You only need to ask him for help.***

What kind of man is this? What kind of man is Jesus? Today we have learned that he is Lord of the machine. The machine that we call the Universe.

Do you understand your place in that machine? Jesus calls to you. He invites you to follow him. Would you take your place in that machine? Will you admit that you, too, are someone under his authority? Will you make him the Lord of your life? Talk to us, we'll tell you how. There are some important links at the end of this article.

In the meantime, come back next week as we ask again: What kind of man is this?

---

**Thanks for reading! Here are some helpful links:**

Trinity Church  
[www.TrinityTeaneck.org](http://www.TrinityTeaneck.org)

Phil's Site  
[PhilBrainerd.com](http://PhilBrainerd.com)

To learn how to begin a new life with Jesus Christ, visit Billy Graham's site:

[PeaceWithGod.net](http://PeaceWithGod.net)