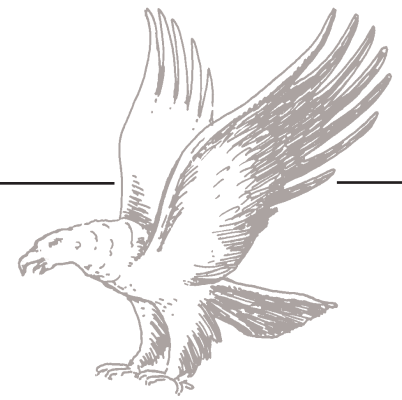


# Wings

*"Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;  
they shall mount up with wings like eagles."  
Isaiah 40:31*



March 16, 2014

## Proximity Is Not Faith

Those who claim to follow Jesus often confuse their close relationship with the Master with "faith." The two are not necessarily the same.

*"When Jesus heard it, He marveled, and said to those who followed, 'Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!'"* (Matt. 8:10).

*"But He said to them, 'Why are you fearful, O you of little faith?' Then He arose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm"* (Matt. 8:26).

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The fact that these two stories, found next to each other in Matthew's gospel, feature one party with "great faith" and another with "little faith" suggests a deliberate lesson in contrasts. The lesson becomes even more remarkable when we look at the two parties whose faith is being contrasted.

The first story involves a centurion (v. 5)—a Roman soldier whose sworn duty was to subjugate the people of God under the heel of their pagan overlords. But this centurion was not here to throw his weight around. On the contrary, Luke records that this Roman was kindly disposed to the Jews, having financed the building of a synagogue for them.

Even the Jewish elders spoke highly of him (Lk. 7:4-5).

The centurion sought Jesus in behalf of his servant, sick and near death. He had heard of Jesus' miracles, and hoped to secure one for his servant. But when Jesus agreed to come to his house, the centurion protested that he was not worthy of such an honor; Jesus could perform the miracle from His current location. The centurion was familiar with authority; if Jesus could do it at all, He could do it from anywhere, with only a word (v. 8-9). It was an expression of faith that left Jesus astonished.

The second story involves not a Roman, and not critics from among the Jewish leadership, nor even the multitudes who followed Him. Rather, it features His own disciples, the apostles. While crossing the Sea of Galilee with Jesus, they encountered a storm that threatened to swamp their small boat. Overcome with panic, they pleaded to Jesus for deliverance: "Lord, save us! We are perishing!" (v. 25). It never occurred to them that they already had Jesus with them in the boat; were they

really in any serious danger? In their minds, having Jesus in their midst offered no protection from the danger around them. Jesus' rebuke was well-deserved: "Why are you fearful, O you of little faith?" If they feared for their lives, *with Jesus right there in the boat with them*, did they have any faith at all?

The contrast in these two stories could not be more stark. On the one hand, a pagan (decent, but still a pagan) displayed absolute confidence in Jesus' ability to work a miracle remotely. On the other hand, Jesus' closest companions, when faced with a minor threat, fell to pieces in terror.

Faith is not a function of our proximity to the Lord. That's why regular church-goers are routinely put to shame by drug addicts and prostitutes. One group is proud of their connection with the Creator, but struggles to leverage that relationship for strength in their daily lives. The other group knows their lives are in shambles and flee to Jesus for refuge. They cling tightly to Him with all their might, because they *need* Him. *That* is the faith that saves.

— David King