

Amazing Faith

Rev. Dr. Phil Reed on Coming to Jesus, Kneeling Before His Authority, and Surrendering Misplaced Ambition

Program Summary

In this Tuesday edition of Mark & Friends, Rev. Dr. Phil Reed begins a two-day Pinnacle Forum message on 'Amazing Faith' from Matthew 8 and the Roman centurion who astonished Jesus. Phil notes that Scripture specifically says Jesus was amazed only twice - once at unbelief and once at the centurion's faith - and asks what kind of faith could amaze Jesus. His first answer is that amazing faith moves us toward Jesus. The centurion was a battle-hardened leader accustomed to authority, responsibility, and people coming to him, yet he publicly left his garrison and went to Jesus with a need. Phil applies that movement to leaders who feel restless, unsettled, ambitious, or uncertain about their next assignment: when God stirs something within, go to Jesus even when doing so is costly. The message then deepens from movement to surrender. A soldier recognizes rank, and Phil imagines the centurion kneeling before Jesus. That becomes the searching question for every listener: To whom or to what do I kneel? Achievement, accomplishment, money, recognition, career, and even retirement can quietly become ruling authorities. Phil candidly describes being financially and practically prepared for retirement but spiritually unprepared for the transition, eventually recognizing that his problem was not ambition itself but misplaced ambition. Amazing faith is therefore a kneeling faith - drive and influence surrendered to the authority and purposes of Jesus.

Key Takeaways

Amazing faith is not manufactured by willpower; Phil describes it as something God awakens within us when we encounter Jesus.

Amazing faith begins by moving toward Jesus, even when doing so is public, countercultural, humbling, or costly. The centurion was accustomed to people coming to him, yet his need moved him to leave his position and seek Jesus. Leadership includes accepting responsibility for other people's lives and leading from the front rather than merely issuing directions from the rear.

Restlessness, uncertainty, ambition, or a sense that something needs to change can become invitations to seek Jesus for direction.

Humility is visible when a capable and accomplished person admits need and acknowledges an authority greater than self.

A soldier understands rank; amazing faith recognizes Jesus' authority and kneels before Him.

Achievement and accomplishment can become functional authorities when they determine schedules, priorities, identity, and allegiance.

Professional success can coexist with average or neglected relationships if ambition is not surrendered to God.

Retirement is not merely a financial transition; it can also be a spiritual transition requiring discernment about calling, identity, and purpose.

Ambition itself is not necessarily the problem; ambition becomes dangerous when it is misplaced in things the world recognizes rather than what matters to God.

God-given drive, influence, ability, and opportunity are healthiest when surrendered to Jesus and redirected toward His purposes.

Scripture References

Matthew 8:5-13, Matthew 8:10, Matthew 8:13, Mark 6:6, Luke 7:1-10, John 4:46-54, Matthew 5-7, Proverbs 3:5-6, Matthew 6:33, Philippians 3:7-8

Quote of the Day

"Amazing faith is a kneeling faith."

Broadcast Notes

Mark introduces Rev. Dr. Phil Reed, a retired Presbyterian pastor who studied at Princeton and Fuller Theological Seminaries and served congregations in several states. Illinois listeners may especially know Phil as the founding executive director of Pinnacle Forum Illinois, where for more than twenty years he has helped form and facilitate Forums focused on faith, calling, leadership, and influence. The message comes from the Pinnacle Forum National Conference in Arizona this past April. Phil reads Matthew 8:5-13 and says his goal is not merely to discuss ordinary faith but to expand the listeners' concept toward 'amazing faith.' He says amazing faith is awakened when people encounter Jesus. The Roman centurion becomes his first example. Phil emphasizes the centurion's military standing: a disciplined, battle-hardened officer responsible for roughly one hundred soldiers and accustomed to carrying responsibility for other lives. Centurions led from the front and faced unusual danger because of it. Phil connects that leadership profile with Pinnacle Forum participants and other people whose work carries responsibility for employees, students, patients, clients, families, or communities. The striking detail in Matthew is that the centurion goes to Jesus. For a Roman authority figure to walk publicly through Capernaum toward a Jewish teacher involved humility, need, and risk to status. Phil therefore says amazing faith first moves us toward Jesus. He applies this to people who sense restlessness, ambition, uncertainty, or calling but do not know the next step: God may be stirring them toward Jesus. Phil then imagines the soldier assessing Jesus' rank and kneeling. This leads to the question, 'To whom or to what do you kneel?' Achievement and accomplishment can become ruling authorities that shape schedules and priorities, sometimes at the expense of marriage and family relationships. Phil's own retirement becomes the central personal illustration. Though prepared financially, psychologically, and relationally, he realized he had not been spiritually prepared for the transition. He repeatedly returned to ministry assignments and jokingly says he 'flunked retirement' three times. Eventually he recognized that the deeper issue was not ambition but misplaced ambition. Part One closes with the declaration that amazing faith is kneeling faith and Mark's invitation to examine whether success, money, recognition, career, retirement plans, or Jesus has become the authority around which life is arranged.

Practical Applications

When I feel restless or uncertain about my next step, go first to Jesus rather than immediately constructing another plan.

Name one area where admitting need feels costly to my image, position, or sense of competence, and bring that need honestly to Jesus.

Ask whether I am leading from the front by accepting responsibility and modeling what I ask of others.

Review my calendar and priorities to see what they reveal about the authority I actually serve.

Ask whether achievement or accomplishment has received more attention than my spouse, children, grandchildren, friendships, or walk with God.

Physically kneel in prayer this week, if able, as a tangible reminder that Jesus outranks every other authority in my life.

If I am approaching retirement or another major transition, include spiritual preparation alongside financial and practical planning.

Write down the ambitions that still energize me and ask God which are surrendered, which are misplaced, and which need to be redirected.

Thank God for drive and ability rather than condemning ambition itself; ask Him to place those gifts under His purposes.

Notice whether recognition, phone calls, titles, or being needed have become important sources of identity.

Ask, 'To whom or to what am I kneeling?' whenever a decision reveals competing loyalties.

Choose one concrete way this week to place a relationship or kingdom priority ahead of an achievement-oriented priority.

Today's Challenge

For the next seven days, begin with Phil's question: 'To whom or to what am I kneeling?' Write down the first honest answer that comes to mind - Jesus, achievement, money, recognition, career, comfort, control, retirement plans, or something else. Then physically open your hands or kneel if you are able and pray: 'Jesus, redirect my ambition under Your authority.' Take one concrete action that day showing that Jesus, rather than achievement or status, is setting the priority.

Closing Prayer

Father, awaken in me the kind of faith that moves toward Jesus. When I am restless, uncertain, ambitious, or unsure of my next assignment, keep me from assuming I can solve everything through my own experience and drive. Give me humility to admit my need and courage to come to You even when it costs me pride or status. Search my heart and

show me what I have allowed to become an authority over my life. If achievement, accomplishment, money, recognition, career, comfort, or even my plans for retirement have begun arranging my priorities, teach me to kneel again before Jesus. Thank You for the ambition, abilities, opportunities, and influence You have entrusted to me. I do not want to waste those gifts, but I also do not want them misplaced. Redirect my drive toward what matters to You. Help me lead from the front, care faithfully for the people whose lives You have placed near mine, and prepare spiritually for every transition You allow. Jesus, You are Lord. Arrange my schedule, relationships, plans, calling, and future under Your authority. Give me amazing faith - a faith that comes to You and kneels before You. In Jesus' name, Amen.

About Today's Speaker

Rev. Dr. Phil Reed is a Presbyterian pastor, now honorably retired, who studied at Princeton and Fuller Theological Seminaries and served congregations in several states. He is especially known in Illinois as the founding executive director of Pinnacle Forum Illinois. For more than twenty years, Phil has helped form and facilitate Pinnacle Forums and has encouraged followers of Jesus to think seriously about faith, calling, leadership, influence, and cultural engagement. In this two-day conference message, he explores the Roman centurion of Matthew 8 and asks what kind of faith could cause Jesus Himself to be amazed.

About Today's Host

Mark Burns is General Manager of the WLJF Family of Stations and Great News Radio Network and host of Mark & Friends. For decades, Mark has been involved in Christian radio and ministry, with a heart for helping listeners know Jesus and grow deeper in God's Word. Through Mark & Friends, he brings pastors, ministry leaders, teachers, missionaries, authors, and everyday believers around the microphone for biblical teaching, testimony, conversation, and encouragement. His desire is that each program help listeners learn, grow, and faithfully live out their relationship with Jesus.

Proofread Broadcast Transcript

Reading from Matthew 8, verses 10 and 13. 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.

Then Jesus said to the centurion, Go, let it be done just as you believed it would. Matthew 8, verses 10 and 13. O magnify the Lord with me, let us exalt His name together.

It's Tuesday, September 29th, 2026, and welcome to Mark & Friends. For the third week in a row, we're sharing another special two-day presentation from the Pinnacle Forum National Conference held in Arizona this past April, where high-impact leaders who follow Christ are encouraged and equipped to influence culture for him. Today's speaker is Rev. Dr. Phil Reed.

Phil is a Presbyterian pastor, now honorably retired, who studied at Princeton and Fuller Theological Seminaries and served congregations in several states. But many of us here in Illinois especially know Phil as the founding executive director of Pinnacle Forum Illinois. For more than 20 years, he's been helping form and facilitate Pinnacle Forums and helping followers of Jesus think seriously about faith, calling, leadership, and influence.

Today Phil asks us to consider something fascinating. Only twice in Scripture are we specifically told Jesus was amazed, once by unbelief and once by a Roman centurion's remarkable faith. So what kind of faith amazes Jesus? That's where we're headed today and tomorrow.

Learn more about Pinnacle Forum at PinnacleForum.com Here's Rev. Dr. Phil Reed with Amazing Faith on today's edition of Mark & Friends. Friends, our Scripture reading this morning is from the Gospel of Matthew, the 8th chapter. Hear the word of God.

When Jesus entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him, appealing to him, and saying, Lord, my servant is lying at home paralyzed in terrible distress. And Jesus said to him, I will come and cure him. The centurion answered, Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof, but only speak the word, and my servant will be healed.

For I am also a man under authority, with soldiers under me. And I say to one, go, and he goes, and to another, come, and he comes. And to my slave, do this, and the slave does it.

When Jesus heard him, he was amazed and said to those who followed him, Truly I tell you, in no one in Israel have I found such faith. I tell you, many will come from the east and west, and will take their place at the banquet with

Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the heirs of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. And Jesus said to the centurion, Go, and let it be done for you according to your faith.

And the servant was healed in that hour. May God bless to our understanding this reading from his holy word. Our subject today is faith.

But not just ordinary faith, not just simple faith. It's amazing faith. And my hope today is to expand our concept of faith so that we all might know what it means to have amazing faith and before you think, oh, that's not possible.

It is, because it's happened before. And we're going to look at the story. Pinnacle Forum has meant the world to me.

And the reason is this. It's one of the vehicles that God uses to build up amazing faith in people. Not just regular faith, not just simple faith, not just average faith.

It's God working through us. And here's what amazing faith is. Amazing faith is what awakens in you when you encounter Jesus Christ.

It's not something we think. It's not something we will. It's not something we feel.

Although that's a part of it. But it's something that God does within us. That God awakens in us.

It's an energy. It's a power that wells up when we encounter Jesus Christ. Now, let me tell you the story.

It's a story about a centurion who comes to Jesus. There's only two places in the New Testament where we are told that Jesus is amazed. We don't normally think of Jesus in these kind of categories.

But there are two. The first one I'm not going to talk about. And it happened in the Gospel of Mark in the town of Nazareth, Jesus' hometown.

Jesus was amazed at the lack of faith in Nazareth. And then he's amazed at this centurion's faith. The first thing about amazing faith is this.

Amazing faith encourages us to come to Jesus. This is how this Scripture reading starts. When he entered Capernaum, this is Jesus, a centurion came to him.

When he entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him. Very innocent-sounding sentence, but it's really not. Because the centurion comes to Jesus.

Who is this centurion? We don't know his name, but we do know a lot about this person because he is a centurion. A centurion is a Roman officer who is the commander of a garrison of 100 soldiers, centurion. It's a greatly honored and esteemed position in the Roman military.

A centurion is not there by political appointment, nor are they there as a result of patronage or anything like that. They have earned the position. They are battle-hardened soldiers who have risen through the ranks, who have lived a life of discipline, who have lived within a context of authority, who have a history and track record of leading soldiers, leading them into battle, and more.

They are men of great dignity and great power. And this is where their story begins to intersect people like us. Centurions are people who willingly accept responsibility for other people's lives.

They are willing to hold another life, in fact, a lot of other lives, within their hands. And their decisions are life and death. Their decisions are the future for these folks, for the soldiers.

And they gravitate to this position. They are recognized by their peers of being able to handle that responsibility, and they accept it. The thing about centurions is they were more than twice as likely to be killed or seriously injured in battle.

They did not lead from the rear. They led from the front. And if you're going to be responsible for other people's lives, you've got to lead from the front.

You can't just sit back there and tell people what to do. You've got to show them. You've got to lead them.

You've got to look at the battle and go right into it. And what I found in Pinnacle Forum, the differentiating factor for people in Pinnacle Forum, is that some of you, many of you, are willing to be responsible for other people's lives. You are employers.

You are teachers. You are physicians. You are attorneys.

And you are willing to make life and death decisions, maybe not just in physical terms, but that will impact other people. This is not something that normal people really do. They prefer not to be responsible for other people.

They like to tell people things, but they don't really want to be responsible. But you are. You are a centurion.

In ancient Rome, they were all men. That's no longer true. You are someone who has a calling in your life to lead not from the rear but from the front and bring other people with you.

So this centurion comes to Jesus highly unusual, highly atypical. The centurion is the commander of the garrison in the community of Capernaum. That means he's the chief law enforcement officer.

So he's responsible with the authority of Caesar himself to protect and take care of the order, to make sure everybody's okay, tolerating the Jews. He's not a Jew, by the way. Keeping things in line, making sure they're paying their taxes.

People come to him. People come to him with their complaints, with their concerns, with their needs, with their requests. He's in the garrison all day.

Here comes people. He's got the troops to manage. Yet this centurion gets up out of the garrison and goes to Jesus.

There are three accounts of this story in the New Testament. There's one in Matthew, there's one in Luke, and there's one that relates to it, connects to it in the Gospel of John. And there are differences between these accounts.

In Matthew, the centurion goes to Jesus. In Luke, the centurion does not go to Jesus. Instead, the centurion sends some Jewish people to go talk to Jesus on his behalf, but the centurion stays in the garrison.

And in John's Gospel, it's a similar story, and it's not that the person is a centurion. It says he's a royal official, which may be a centurion, but also may be a Jewish official. And it's not about the servant, it's about his son.

And this is the version that was in the Chosen. If you saw the Chosen, this is the incident they pulled from. But in Matthew, the centurion goes to Jesus.

It's a very crucial detail, because Matthew's Gospel is written to Jewish early Christians who have a Jewish background. And that detail is especially significant because the centurion comes to Jesus. It is what? It's admitting a need.

It's affirming something about Jesus, who is Jewish. There's humility there. We'll talk about that in a second.

But the centurion is doing something totally unexpected, totally countercultural. He's coming to Jesus. And so for him to walk from the garrison to where Jesus is through the town of Capernaum, which is not a metropolis, it's a little town, is a public act, which people would notice, because everybody keeps track of where the centurion is.

And here he's walking to Jesus. Amazing faith begins by moving us to Jesus. There's something about him that draws us.

We don't have any idea what the centurion was thinking, but there was something. He had heard some stories. He had heard people talk about Jesus.

This is early on in Jesus' ministry. In Matthew's Gospel, it's Matthew 8. Matthew 4 is Jesus is tested in the wilderness. Matthew 5, 6, and 7 are the Sermon on the Mount.

Chapter 8 begins with Jesus healing somebody, and then we have our story about the centurion. This is early on. This is when there's not well-formed public knowledge of who Jesus is, but the centurion has heard something, and so he comes to Jesus.

So when you feel something stirring in you, when something has got you unsettled, when something has got you wondering, when something has got you bothered, when something has got you, and it's kind of like a calling. I don't know what I'm supposed to do, but I'm supposed to do something. When something's got you restless, and you don't know what to do with your ambition, and you don't know what to do with your drive, and you don't know what to do, what the next step is, and you don't know what God is calling you to, but it's something.

God is at work in you, pointing you to Jesus. Go to Him, even if it's costly to do so. Go to Him.

That's the beginning of amazing faith. Now, the centurion arrives at Jesus, probably seeing Jesus for the first time. Soldiers are carefully trained to assess the people who are right in front of them.

To assess their rank. Is this someone of higher authority or lower authority? Is this someone who has power over me, or do I have power over this person? This is what soldiers do. Because you need to be prepared to acknowledge the

relationship in the first moment.

Now, we all know when soldiers encounter one another, what do they do? They salute, and the relationship is acknowledged. You ever notice how people salute in Hollywood movies and on TV shows? Somebody should train those people, those actors, how to salute properly. You can always tell a movie salute.

You know, they're over here, over here, right. You know, they're doing this, you know. This is how you salute.

How would a Roman centurion salute? But he didn't do that when he got to Jesus, right? Use your imagination. Matthew doesn't tell us exactly what happened, but here he comes. He's coming across the town, and he meets Jesus.

He's a soldier. He recognizes rank. This is what a soldier does when he recognizes a king.

He goes down on one knee. He bows. So to whom or what do you kneel? We don't do this in our churches.

Catholics do it. Some other denominations do it. They have kneelers right there in the pews.

They come back from communion. They pull the kneelers out. They get on their knees.

They're soldiers. They're recognizing rank. We don't practice kneeling, but in our hearts, we do.

In our hearts, we bow down to greater authorities. To whom or to what do you kneel? It's likely to be something like our drive to succeed. We are ambitious people of accomplishment and achievement, and we tend to shape our whole lives around those two things.

We tend to structure our lives, set our schedules, establish our priorities according to accomplishment and achievement. They become the presiding authorities in our lives. They become more important than many other things.

We kneel before them, and the consequence of that is many of us are highly accomplished people, but just average in relationships with our spouses, with our children, with our grandchildren. We bow down to the priorities of this world, and we assign our allegiance to these things. And one of the most important times in our lives, when this becomes abundantly clear, is when we retire.

Our culture thinks retirement means permanent vacation. You retire. It's golf every day.

It's restaurants every night. You've made it. It's defined by financial independence.

Financial independence is you can do what you want when you want to do it. And it's great. It's fantastic.

I retired in 2022, but after 2 weeks, I was a mess. I missed the structure. I went from being a VIP to a PIP.

Previously Important Person. Got a lot less texts, a lot less phone calls. What do I do all day? What do I do all day? I thought about applying to be one of these sample givers at Costco.

You know, you get a discount. I didn't have a sense of who I was and what I'm supposed to do with my life. What do I do now? Permanent vacation is fun for a little while, but what do you do with your drive? What do you do with your ambition? More importantly, what do you do with your call from God? And I figured out, I didn't figure this out, it was a revelation, that I was prepared for retirement in every single way, financially, psychologically, family-wise, marriage-wise, except one.

I was not spiritually prepared to retire, to make this transition in life, one of life's most important transitions. I wasn't prepared to discern what God had in mind for me going forward. And so I thought it was just what I'd always been doing.

I thought it was accomplishment. I thought it was achievement. I thought it was doing what I had done and received good feelings about and some success.

I thought it was about all that, and so I flunked retirement the first time. First chance I got, back to, oh yeah, I can do that. I can come and serve this church for four months.

I did that, then I flunked retirement again. Oh yeah, I can come and do that. That'll be great.

And you know what? After that, I did it again. Flunked retirement the third time. Oh, I can give you a year.

And truth be told, I'm still doing it. I have a little part-time thing. It's not Costco, it's a church.

But it's giving samples. What is wrong with me? What is my problem? It's not that... I know what the problem is. The problem is my faith.

The problem is not my ambition. The problem isn't your ambition either. The problem is, my ambition is misplaced.

The problem is, I have placed it in things that you would recognize and not the things that are important to God. I'm probably not the only person in the same room with this issue. To whom or what do you kneel? A centurion, a battle-hardened soldier, someone the world of Rome recognizes as top of the heap, quarterback in the NFL, gets to Jesus.

He must have kneeled. He must have seen something that causes a soldier to kneel. Amazing faith is a kneeling faith.

Yes, amazing faith is kneeling faith. Listening friends, perhaps that's a question worth carrying with us today. To whom or to what am I kneeling? Is it Jesus or his accomplishments, success, money, recognition, career, even my own plans for retirement or future quietly become the authority around which I'm arranging my life? I appreciate Phil's honesty.

He discovered that his problem wasn't necessarily ambition. His ambition had become misplaced. And maybe that's something for all of us to prayerfully consider.

God can give us drive, ability, influence, and opportunities, but are they surrendered to his purposes? And we're only halfway through this message. Tomorrow on the Wednesday edition of Mark & Friends, we'll return to the centurion as Phil shows us more of what amazing faith looks like. Faith that cares for others, recognizes our limitations, understands the authority of Jesus, speaks important words, and ultimately trusts.

Learn more about Pinnacle Forum at PinnacleForum.com. And if you missed part of today's broadcast or want to hear it again, read the transcripts and explore scriptures, key takeaways, and additional ministry resources, visit the Mark & Friends tab at GreatNewsRadio.org or WLUJ.org. Thanks for listening. Thanks for being a part of our radio listening family. This is Mark Burns with the Ministry of Great News Media.

God bless you, and have a great day and night.