

DID JESUS HEAL A SAME-SEX PARTNER?

Response to Jay Michaelson, "When Jesus Healed a Same-Sex Partner"

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jay-michaelson/when-jesus-healed-a-same-sexpartner_b_1743947.html

Jay Michaelson makes the claim that when Jesus healed a centurion's servant, he was really healing the centurion's same-sex partner. The implications are that "Jesus is extending his hand not only to the centurion but to his partner, as well. In addition to Jesus' silence on homosexuality in general (he never mentions same-sex intimacy, not once, despite its prevalence in his social context), it speaks volumes that he did not hesitate to heal a Roman's likely same-sex lover." In other words, Michaelson claims that Jesus is affirming of homosexual activity.

So the questions become, "Is Michaelson handling the New Testament's Greek carefully/accurately, and Is Michaelson handling the Bible correctly? Does the Bible indeed support same-sex unions?"

First claim: The Greek word "*pais* does not mean 'servant.' It means 'lover.' In Thucydides, in Plutarch, in countless Greek sources, and according to leading Greek scholar Kenneth Dover, *pais* refers to the junior partner in a same-sex relationship."

Response: Regardless of how true that may be in some other ancient literature, the Bible is not those sources. And the claim here is actually extremely narrow. The basic meaning of "pais" is not "servant" or "lover," but "child." Michaelson refuses to acknowledge that there is such a thing as semantic range—that the same word can mean a few different things. A "pais" may, in fact, be a younger male relative of the centurion. The centurion Cornelius in Acts 10 had his family with him, so it is not unreasonable that he may have been talking about one of his own relatives. But in v. 9 "pais" is also specifically referred to as a "*doulos*," Greek for "servant" or "slave", so it is not the centurion's relative. Even as per the "servant" meaning of "pais," that does not mean itself that it is referring to the younger partner in a pederasty relationship. Elsewhere in the New Testament, "*pais*" is used like the general meaning of "servant" or "slave" (Luke 12:45; 15:26). In the Septuagint (an ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament), *pais* also means "servant" or "slave" (Gen 9:26, 27; 24:2; and 26:15). *Pais* means "attendant, minister, as of a king" in Matt 14:2 and in the Septuagint of Gen 41:38 and Jer 36:24. *Pais* also means "servant of God, spoken of a minister or ambassador of God, called and beloved of God, and sent by Him to perform any service." This term is used of David in Luke 1:69 and Acts 4:25. It refers this way to Israel in Luke 1:54, coming off of the Septuagint of Isa 41:8, 9; 44:1, 2; 45:4. It speaks of Jesus in his role as Messiah in this way in Matt 12:18, alluding to Isa 42:1, and in Acts 3:13, 28; 4:27 and 30, and in the Septuagint referring to the coming Messiah in Isaiah 49:6; 50:10; and 52:13. In none of those roles is any sexual relationship implied. In other words, if *pais* does in fact mean "lover" in Matt 8:5-13 and Luke 7:1-10, as Michaelson so readily states that it does, these would be the only instances in the New

Testament or the Septuagint (i.e., Old Testament) where it means that. That is pretty shaky ground already.

Why is the author so adamant about such a narrow definition? The author makes further argument for his narrow definition by saying that the centurion “begged” on behalf of his servant, referring to the verb “parakaloon [sic]” But *parakaleo* (the basic form of the verb; *parakalon* is a participle) does not mean “beg.” Again, there is a semantic range for this word as well. This common word means :

- (I) “invite to come”
- (II) “to call for or upon someone as for aid, to invoke God, to beseech, entreat”
- (III) “to call upon someone to do something, to exhort, admonish” and
- (IV) “to exhort in the way of consolation, encouragement, to console, to comfort.”

This last one is followed by “your hearts” in Eph 6:22; Col 4:8; 2 Thess 2:17; Septuagint of Gen 24:67; 37:34; and Deut 32:36, and has a sense of “to make glad” or “to be glad, rejoice” in Luke 16:24 and Acts 20:12. Incidentally, this is the same verb root used to refer to the Spirit as the *parakletos*, the Counselor, Advocate, or Comforter. In other words, it is being used in this sense to mean “ask” (i.e., the second definition), but it does not carry the sense of “beg.” It is simply a request, as one would one’s superior. The key here is that the word is used, not because the centurion is desperate, but because he recognizes that Jesus is his superior. In fact, it is his understanding of such authority that is the focus of the passage. It makes perfect sense that a centurion would ask someone to heal his servant, regardless of whether they have a sexual relationship. His servant is a paralytic— suffering, and useless as a servant. It is not too much to suppose that a person did not want to see unnecessary suffering in another person, or that a master wanted his servant to be useful to him again. That is basic humanity.

Second claim: “he [Jesus] never mentions same-sex intimacy, not once, despite its prevalence in his social context.”

Response: First, this is like saying that Jesus approves of running people over with cars because he never talks about cars, not even once. Jesus’ teachings focused on his social context, which was first century Judaea, not the Greco-Roman world in general. Same-sex relationships were NOT prevalent in Jesus’ social context. Jesus was a first-century religious Jew, and sexual relationships between same-sex partners were a tremendous taboo. That does not mean that it never occurred, but it was by no means approved of in first century Judaism. Since same-sex sexual relationships were already forbidden, what need had He to speak further of the issue?

That said, Jesus address issues of sexual purity, and His take is sometimes stricter than that of the Old Testament. For instance, Jesus made it clear that adultery was not just a matter of physical activity, but mental as well (Matthew 5). Jesus did not affirm the sexually immoral activities of the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4) or the woman caught in adultery to whom He said “Go and sin no more” (John 8).

In Matthew 19, when He is asked for a theology on divorce (which is by its very nature a theology of marriage itself and thus a theology on sexual relationships in general),

Jesus points to the created order. He refers to the Genesis account of creation, concluding that “Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” When Jesus did that, he showed that the model for marriage was revealed in Adam and Eve, and of course, *all* sexual relationships were to be within the bounds of marriage. Though the phrase “It’s not Adam and Steve; it’s Adam and Eve” is hackneyed and trite, it is also true: Christ appealed to the created order for the model of sexual relationships, especially marriage itself. While it is not a direct teaching on homosexuality, it affirms the Genesis position on sexual relationships and marriage. Sexual relationships, which are only to occur in marriage, are also only to occur between a man and a woman.

But what if the centurion and his servant were involved in a sexual relationship?

Response: For the sake of argument, let us assume that the *pais* was indeed the centurion’s junior pederastic partner. That sort of thing was not unheard of in the Greco-Roman world. Here we come to the crux of what Michaelson claims in the article: “what about the fact that the only sanctioned relationship in the Bible is between a man and a woman? Well, in fact, that is not quite the case.” The author claims that Jesus sanctions the (supposed) same-sex sexual relationship. But does this passage indeed show (or even hint) that Jesus sanctioned a same-sex relationship? No. The point of the narrative is the centurion’s faith in Jesus’ authority, especially juxtaposed against the doubt of the religious leaders, not any possible relationship which the centurion had with his servant. In other words, it is the centurion’s faith that is sanctioned. This is clear by the use of the verb *parakaleo*. The centurion, who cares about his servant, recognizes Jesus is his superior, and in his own words recognizes Jesus’ authority. He has complete faith that Jesus, having authority to make his servant well, can do so regardless of his location.

In sum, Michaelson’s argument that Jesus affirmed same-sex relationships is a gross misinterpretation of the New Testament, and completely misses the point of the passage.

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