

## **Awe of the Crucifixion**

Romans 5:6-10

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*Good Friday Service*

*6 For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. 7 For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— 8 but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. 9 Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. 10 For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.*

(Micah speaks 5 minutes about Jesus' trial and events that lead to the cross.)

### **The Death of Jesus**

**45** Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. **46** And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” that is, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” **47** And some of the bystanders, hearing it, said, “This man is calling Elijah.” **48** And one of them at once ran and took a sponge, filled it with sour wine, and put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink. **49** But the others said, “Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him.” **50** And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit.

**51** And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split. **52** The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, **53** and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many. **54** When the centurion and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe and said, “Truly this was the Son of God!”

A Roman centurion was a professional military officer entrusted with a platoon of troops called a “century.”

Soldiers were appointed as centurions by virtue of their bravery, loyalty, character, and prowess in battle. Only the best of the best. Centurions were held to high standards of conduct and were expected to fight on the front lines with their men. As a result, Roman centurions were well paid and held in high esteem, and they experienced high rates of injury and death during war. The combination of wealth, power, and prestige made them influential in society. The centurions are noted for their position of authority. Because of this, centurions were required to be fully devoted to the cause of the Roman government.

Scripture tells us of a few different Centurions when they had interactions with Jesus. Including the centurion that oversaw the crucifixion of Christ. Now, Scripture does not name this centurion, and church history is conflicted with whom this centurion may be. What we do know is that he stood in awe of who Jesus was at the crucifixion.

This centurion likely stood in the streets of Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, as he witnessed the events of the day... This pagan, Roman man would have seen Jesus coming through the gates of the city, riding on a donkey. The crowded streets erupt in cheers and praise. At this point in Jesus’s ministry, he was well known. Some people loved Him, some hated Him. Some thought he was a good teacher, others thought he was a prophet. It seemed everyone had an opinion of who Jesus was... but one thing was for sure... the stories of Jesus had spread like wildfire... Not only would the narrow streets of Jerusalem have been full from people coming to celebrate the Passover, but the crowds of people following Jesus would have made these streets nearly immovable.

Only a couple of days earlier, Zacchaeus the despised tax collector fought through similar crowds in Jericho with the desire to simply rest his eyes upon Jesus... Zacchaeus was willing to go to any length and ended up climbing a tree to see the man he had heard so much about. For Zacchaeus, seeing Jesus was a life changing event... actually, it was an eternity changing day.

This centurion surely would have heard the stories that caused the crowds of people to follow Jesus...

**John 12:17-18**

**17** The crowd that had been with him when he called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to bear witness. **18** The reason why the crowd went to meet him was that they heard he had done this sign.

A good soldier would have his ear to the ground... would be aware of the events going on in the area... He surely would have known the stories of the miracles Jesus had done. When you close your eyes and picture what was going on... it was quite a spectacle. Probably something like he had never seen before. This poor, nomadic man on the back of a young lowly colt.

**Luke 19:36:38**

**36** And as he rode along, they spread their cloaks on the road. **37** As he was drawing near (to Jerusalem)—already on the way down the Mount of Olives—the whole multitude of his disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen, **38** saying, “Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!”.

The cheers and cries associated with Jesus coming to the city of Jerusalem must have been heard from far outside the city gates... people spilling out of homes onto this packed street. Anxiously waiting for Jesus to arrive. Or maybe even running out of the city gates to join this crowd of people that was with Jesus. I wonder what this centurion's thoughts were though? Was he like Zacchaeus and intrigued, curious, wondered if these stories could actually be true? Was this pagan hardened soldier wondering if maybe there was truth that Jesus was actually the living son of the Jews God? Or maybe this centurion's heart was hardened, did he just elbow the soldier next to him and roll his eyes... did he sigh and think... This is gonna be a long night! Was his mindset, he was assigned a job to do, and he was simply following orders?

This same centurion must have been shocked, when only a few days later this same man, Jesus, who was just celebrated coming into the city of Jerusalem, was now standing at the center of a horrific and unjust trial. This centurion had to be confused. Being a pagan, he probably didn't understand the implications to the Jewish faith, when Jesus claimed to be the Son of God. This centurion would have heard Jesus's reputation of miracles and pushing cultural norms and standards, but of loving people, meeting people where they were at in life, Jesus calling people to repent from sin and to live lives of holiness.

So, when the orders came down that he was going to personally oversee the crucifixion of Christ, was this centurion conflicted? Was there something swelling inside of him that knew this wasn't right? Was there something inside of him that knew Jesus was innocent? Or, was he just being a good soldier... obeying orders... doing his job?

This centurion would probably have presided over the deaths of numerous criminals. He was battle trained and war hardened. The idea of nailing a simple thief to a cross had

become just a normal part of his job. The beatings and scourging, as the flesh was torn from the back of Jesus, was all in a days work.

How calloused his heart must have become. BUT none of the previous crucifixions he had seen, could have prepared him for what he was about to experience. None of them were marked by the things that accompanied the death of Jesus. Through the entire trial, Jesus continued to show meekness and did not speak in His own defense or argue. This centurion must have been shocked... why was Jesus not defending himself... why was Jesus not begging for the torture to end?

It was remarkable how quickly the crowds went from celebrating Jesus just a few days prior as he rode into Jerusalem, to now many cheered and celebrated saying crucify Him! Surely the centurion took note of that. The centurion could see that this was no ordinary crucifixion. Every previous crucifixion they had begged the centurion to stop, begged the centurion to end their pain, or had lashed out at the centurion condemning him for his leadership in this torture. The centurion must have been shocked when Jesus began to pray for His God to forgive the centurion that was overseeing his brutal death.

Jesus looked down from the cross upon a scene that must have been distressing to Him. The Roman soldiers were gambling for His clothing; the criminals on the crosses to either side of Him were reviling Him; the religious leaders were mocking Him and the crowd was blaspheming Him. Surrounded by this most unworthy lot, Jesus prayed for them. "Father, forgive them" this is a prayer of unmatched mercy and love.

Even in His agony, Jesus' concern was for the forgiveness of those who counted themselves among His enemies. He asked the Father to forgive the thieves on the cross who jeered at Him. He asked the Father to forgive the Roman soldiers who had mocked Him, spit on Him, beat Him, yanked out His beard, whipped Him, put a crown of thorns on His head, and nailed Him to the cross. Jesus asked forgiveness for the angry mob that had mocked Him and insisted for His crucifixion. I imagine Jesus' gentle eyes, piercing into the centurion, as Jesus looked down at him and offered forgiveness to the centurion

that was standing at command of this crucifixion. The turmoil that must have been going on in this soldier's heart.

This centurion began to realize, this was no ordinary man. This was no ordinary crucifixion. The centurion stood in awe of the continued responses of Jesus. Jesus not only offered forgiveness to all those that were implicit in his death, but he even spoke to the thief that was nailed on the cross next to him and promised him an eternity in paradise.

The process of crucifixion is beyond brutal in torture. Hanging from the cross actually restricted his ability to actually exhale a breath. Without the ability to exhale, levels of carbon dioxide would continue to build in his body, levels of oxygen would continue to drop, his heart would begin to fail, heart arrhythmia would occur, with the blood loss, hypovolemic shock continues, acidosis, dehydration, and pulmonary embolism.... And the list continues... yet... YET... Matthew 27:46-50 Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” that is, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

The centurion had never seen this happen before... Jesus’ physical body should have succumbed to the trauma that had been inflicted on it... every other crucifixion this centurion would have seen, they would have gone unconscious before death... BUT this crucifixion was different... because in this moment Jesus mustered up the strength to first claim victory for man over sin. “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? This was the exact moment in history when Jesus took upon himself the weight of the fallen world. In this exact moment every sin, of every man over the course of creation was piled upon him. The sinless experienced the weight of sin. This cry of Jesus though, wasn’t a cry of defeat, but was a cry of freedom for man.

Octavius Winslow, a theologian from the 1800s, reflected on this scene as he wrote “Little did they dream, as they bound the fatal wood upon His shoulder, by whose power that tree was made to grow, and from whom the beings who bore Him to the death drew their existence. So completely was Jesus bent upon saving sinners by the sacrifice of Himself, He created the tree upon which He was to die, and nurtured from infancy the men who were to nail Him to the accursed wood.

Oh the depth of Jesus’s love to sinners.

A few moments later, Jesus again harnesses all power within him to cry a second time... “it is finished” and” Jesus yielded up his spirit.” God’s will was officially fulfilled...

**John 6**

**38** For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. **39** And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. **40** For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”

The awe he was experiencing in Christ was intensifying, because creations groaning over the death of the one that spoke creation into existence continued. For the past three hours a supernatural darkness had fallen upon the earth. At the point when Christ gave up his Spirit, the darkness ended... in the light of day, a clear view of the result of the centurion's actions, hung lifeless on the cross... no darkness to hide the reality of what had occurred. a clear view of the result of our sin, hung lifeless on the cross.

Suddenly, the earth's violent response began as the centurion felt a rumble coming from the belly of the earth. The ground began to shake, rocks split. The temple curtain that separated the Holy of Holies, the place where God’s presence resided from the rest of the temple, tore from the top down. This curtain standing 60 feet tall, and believed to be 4

inches thick, made of woven blue, purple and scarlet thread, was ripped in two... The roar of this tearing fabric would have echoed through the temple. As the earth shook, stones covering the entrances of tombs PLURAL were broken and pushed aside, leaving these tombs standing open.

**52** The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, **53** and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many.

What did this scene possibly look like? The bodies of the saints who had previously died were resurrected. We had seen this days previously with Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead... now the power of God is demonstrated again with the raising of some of the saints from death. This isn't just symbolism, but this was a very real event. It says in verse 53 that these resurrected saints were seen by many in Jerusalem. There were eyewitnesses to this account

The centurion... this battle hardened centurion came face to face with Jesus. He experienced the forgiveness that Jesus offered... he experienced the power God has to overcome death. He experienced how all of creation will bow in submission to God.

In this moment of fear, both literal terror flowing through his veins, as well as reverent awe and trembling trust, this centurion surrounded by the men of his platoon made the bold statement that "Truly this was the Son of God!" I love there is an exclamation mark for punctuation.. This was not a grumbling statement... this wasn't a question he was posing to others around him... This was a bold statement... a battle cry. Surely He was the son of God. For this centurion to make a statement on any topic, standing against the Roman Empire, let alone in favor for Jesus, a Jew, would have required great faith and

great humility. Here he stood, a Roman soldier, a representative of Israel's enemy, and yet he understood what even the Jewish elders did not yet grasp... It was a marvel.

Jesus is the son of God!!!!!! And if Jesus IS the Son of God, then it makes fact of John 14:6

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Acts 4:12

**12** And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

A few days before Easter, last year, I got a phone call from one of my buddies, who was my very first paramedic partner, when I worked on an ambulance. He and I have had numerous spiritual conversations. He isn't specifically against Christianity, he just isn't sure of who he believes God really is. My buddy shared with me last year that he was home alone, flipping through TV channels. He stopped on this documentary that discussed from a medical standpoint, all that Jesus went through on his path to the cross. It discussed from a medical standpoint, the implications of the brutal beatings that Jesus endured, and how his body would have been going into shock... it discussed how Jesus would have struggled with each breath he took while hanging on the cross, his body straining for a single breath. My buddy is a paramedic... a medical professional... so this documentary continued to draw him in. My buddy shared with me that he sat there watching this documentary... tears racing down his face... his shoulders heaving. On the phone with him, heaviness still in his voice, he asks me why? Why did Jesus do it? My buddy said... He is God... he could have stopped it... it didn't have to

be so brutal... with a single world God could have made the torture end... through muffled tears my buddy asks, why, why did Jesus have to go through it?

I let him sit in the heaviness of this question for a moment... then responded, Because he loves you. He loves... he loves you so much that he would go to any length to save you.

A perfect ransom price had been paid for human redemption. As a result of this perfect sacrifice, it need not be paid again... because it was Jesus, our redemption was secure... once for all.

BUT AS WE SEE TODAY. GOOD FRIDAY... as we sit in the heaviness of this... as we grieve through the suffering of Christ. His body is broken... His blood poured out. BUT we also celebrate the freedom we have In Christ. We look back and we reflect.. We look at our lives today and we repent... we look ahead and we rejoice

**Acts 4:12**

**He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.**

Jesus sat with his disciples in the upper room and gave them a foreshadowing of this moment.

Here is Jesus, in that intimate final night with his disciples saying, "I am the hope of fallen humanity, because I am the promised, spotless Lamb of God." Just as the blood painted on the israelites' door in Egypt meant that the angel of death would pass over those houses, so all who put their trust in Jesus and the completed work of the cross, are

covered by His blood... the blood of the perfect lamb and therefore will not bear the punishment for their sins.