

# Truly this Man was the son of God

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[ 0 : 00 ] Let us now turn to the passage from which we read, Gospel according to Mark chapter 15, and we may read again at verse 39.

And when the centurion who stood facing him saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, Truly this man was the Son of God.

We live in a world where we speak of events that have changed forever the lives of many families. I am going to suggest that there is one event that has left a more indelible mark on the continuing unfolding happenings in the world.

That is the death of Jesus of Nazareth. In my view, no event has left such a mark upon the life of the world.

[ 1 : 15 ] It is a historical event as well as being a spiritual one. A historical event that is well reported and documented.

The biblical narrative tells us of the accompanying and sometimes strange happenings coinciding with the death of Christ.

For example, the tearing of the temple veil in two from top to bottom. Behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.

Both Matthew and Mark associate the tearing of the veil with the loud voice cry and the final breath of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross.

And although some query which temple curtain this was, I think it is safe to assume that this was the veil that separated the holy place from the most holy place.

[ 2 : 31 ] You may remember that the holy place was frequented on a daily basis by the ministering priests who were on duty.

But the most holy place was only frequented once per year on the great day of atonement. There is no record of anyone taking a knife or scissors to the veil in order to tear it in two.

It was made of thick material, not easily torn. Three of the four gospel writers, Matthew, Mark, Luke, refer to this peculiar, insignificant event.

It took place, as I said already, simultaneously with the death of Christ at three in the afternoon on our clock.

That is, the ninth hour in Jewish timekeeping at that time. That's when the priests, the duty priests, would be offering the daily evening sacrifices.

[ 3 : 46 ] And for those ministering priests, it must have been a surprising event indeed to see this strange phenomenon.

Given their familiarity with Old Testament teaching, it may even have filled them with fear. Now that the most holy place was exposed to their gaze, it may have filled them with foreboding as to what lay behind this strange phenomenon.

whether they understood the significance of the event just then, probably not. But they could not doubt that it was something that could not be attributed to anything natural.

For those with the benefit of New Testament teaching, it signified the new order being ushered in.

No longer was there any impediment to draw near to God.

A new and living way had been opened up through the one sacrifice of the Lamb of God, a sacrifice that satisfied the demands in full of divine justice.

[ 5 : 07 ] So that the writer to the Hebrews writes, Therefore, brethren, having boldness, to enter the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which he consecrated for us through the veil, that is, his flesh.

Now, we ought to remember that this strange phenomenon could only be verified by a very limited number of people initially in the sense that they were witnesses to the happening.

although no doubt word of what took place would quickly spread. But there were other accompanying events of which there were many witnesses.

There was, we are told, an earthquake. That certainly could be verified by many, given it took place during the middle of the afternoon. Many would be aware of the tremor.

No information is given to us as to the severity of the earthquake. We are not told if houses were destroyed or if roads were torn up.

[ 6 : 19 ] But what we are told by Matthew in his account is the earth quaked and the rocks were split. The tearing of the temple veil is not attributed to the force of the earthquake by any of the gospel writers.

They speak first of the tearing of the veil, then the earthquake, and they tell the rocks were split. If they were attributing the tearing of the veil to the earthquake, they would have spoken of the earthquake first, but they didn't.

They spoke of the tearing of the veil first, followed by the earthquake, and the splitting of the rocks. Interestingly, in the Greek, the same root word is used to speak of the veil being torn and the rocks being split.

The same power that tore the veil in the temple in two was also the power that split the rocks, torn asunder, like you and I might tear a piece of paper.

And there was also another strange phenomenon. Matthew tells us the graves were opened and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised and coming out of the graves after his resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many.

[ 7 : 56 ] These were not everyday occurrences. They were not events to which you could close your eyes and pretend that they hadn't happened.

The earth quaked, the rocks were split, the graves were opened and bodies of saints who had fallen asleep. Notice the gospel writers don't say that all the bodies in every grave had risen.

Only the bodies of saints. It doesn't say how many. And notice how the gospel writers speak of the death of the saints.

They had fallen asleep. It's a very suggestive phrase to speak of the death of those who trusted in Christ.

And you remember it is a phrase of which the apostle Paul is also fond of in writing to the Thessalonians.

[ 9 : 12 ] And he is comforting the Thessalonian people as he speaks to them of those who had died.

and you remember how he sums it up. We do not want you to be unenforced brothers about those who are asleep.

He wasn't talking about people who were in bed and sleeping. He was talking about death. That you may not grieve as others do have no hope.

For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus God will bring with him those, and you notice the same phrase, who have fallen asleep.

The coming of the Lord will not precede those who have fallen asleep. so, throughout scripture you find that the death of believers is spoken of as falling asleep.

[ 10 : 18 ] That's not the way the death of the unbeliever is described in the Bible. So, it is significant, the description that is given here.

Now, all of these occurrences were designed, I would suggest, to catch the attention of those who were present at that time.

And we are told how all of these combined events, including the way in which Christ died, or became dead, how these events affected some, and Mark wants to tell us of one particular individual who is to be the focus of our attention today, an army officer, a Roman centurion. Mark records for us the testimony that this man bore as a consequence of having observed these events and how Christ died.

Who was this man? What did he see and hear? Secondly, thirdly, what did he say? Fourthly, how does that speak to you and me?

[ 11 : 41 ] Who was he? And the answer to the question is, I don't know, because the gospel writers do not see fit to disclose his name or to furnish us with background details.

nations. Obviously, the Holy Spirit did not consider that was too important. What we are told is minimal. He was an army officer in the service of the Roman Empire, no doubt a Gentile.

The fact that he is called a centurion indicates that he was responsible for a hundred soldiers. That is the scant information that we are given about this man.

We also know that there were others spoken of in the Bible who held that office. Not all of them are named.

You may remember there was one in Capernaum who approached Jesus with a particular request. His servant was ill and he requested that Jesus might restore his servant to health.

[12:50] Lord, my servant is lying at home. paralyzed, dreadfully, paralyzed, dreadfully tormented. And what was so amazing about that centurion in Capernaum was when Jesus agreed to his request and indicates his willingness to go with him to his home.

This man responds, Lord, I am not worthy that you should come under my roof. Only speak a word and my servant will be healed. Being an officer, he was used to issue in orders and that is understandable.

And we have that in the account. I am a man under authority having soldiers under me and I say to this one go and he goes and to another come and he comes and to my servant do this and he does. And Christ speaks very highly of that centurion. Surely I say to you I have not found such great faith not even in Israel.

There are another two in the Bible at least that I can think of both of them named. Cornelius for example described in the book of Acts has been a devout man and one who feared God with all his household or with all his family who gave alms generously who gave to charity and prayed to God always.

[14:17] Another went by the name of Julius. He was the officer in charge of the soldiers taking Paul and other prisoners to Rome. And you may remember the narrative towards the end of the book of Acts how they were shipwrecked and the soldiers planned to kill the prisoners but were prevented from doing so by this man Julius.

Soldiers plan was to kill the prisoners lest any of them should swim away and escape. But the centurion that is Julius wanting to save Paul kept them from their purpose.

But this centurion at the cross remains unnamed. And all we know about him is that he appears to be in charge of the execution squad overseeing the crucifixion of Jesus and the two others who were crucified along with him.

He is depicted for us by Mark as watching proceedings. Mark tells us that he stood opposite him or facing him when the centurion who stood facing him.

In other words he was in a position to minutely observe what was taking place on the cross. cross. He was there presumably to ensure that no one sought to intervene and to remove Jesus from the cross.

[15:54] I suppose you could say he was on guard duty. In the overriding deep and mysterious providence of God he was appointed to this duty.

And you cannot but marvel at how God uses steps in our providence of which we may be totally unaware for our spiritual good.

Our steps directed in a particular direction and God moves in mysterious ways as wonders to perform.

Here is a man fulfilling orders from his superiors and through these instructions given to him and the duties placed upon him comes to formulate a different opinion of Jesus Christ as to who he was. Who was this man an unknown Gentile centurion on duty obeying instructions in the deep and mysterious and overriding providence of God who comes to formulate a different assessment of the identity of Jesus of Nazareth.

[17:18] What did he see and hear? The impression created by all the gospel writers who make mention of this is that what he saw and heard is linked to his testimony.

testimony. And it seems to me that there are two aspects to what he saw and heard. There is firstly clear and indisputable evidence for some of the things that he saw and heard.

And there are also other things that we may speculate he saw and heard but of which we cannot give clear proof that he did.

And I'd like to deal with a second of these first. John's gospel tells us that when Jesus was arrested in Gethsemane the Judas came accompanied by a detachment of soldiers along with others.

And the word translated detachment is the word for a unit of soldiers. Now a unit of soldiers consisted of 600 soldiers.

[ 18 : 32 ] Commentators are of the view that that number was not present in Gethsemane when Jesus was arrested but that there could be as many as 200. Was there even that many?

I don't know because the Bible doesn't tell me. It's not easy to determine. But what I do know is this when they ask the question whom are you seeking and they responded Jesus of Nazareth. John writes in his account when he said to them I am he they drew back and fell to the ground. And the tenor of scripture indicates that he veiled his glory when he appeared in this world in true human nature.

But there in Gethsemane it's as if a glimpse of his glory shines through the veil of his humanity. And even that brief glimpse is enough to flow the arresting party.

They are paralyzed. They fall back. Was the centurion amongst them? Was he struck by the air of authority that exuded from this person whom they had been sent to arrest?

[ 19 : 47 ] It's possible. Jesus permits this party to arrest him. He was taken to Annas, to Pilate, to Herod, and back to Pilate.

He is accused of stating that he claims to be the son of God. But by their evident mockery they are in total denial as to his identity.

In other words they are saying we do not believe that this person Jesus of Nazareth is the son of God. Did the centurion agree with their assessment at that time?

Possible? Probably. Mocked and assaulted as they beat him. And John writes of how Jesus was ill treated by the soldiers how they mocked his claims.

The soldiers twist a crown of thorns, put it on his head, they put on him a purple robe and they said, Hail, King of the Jews. And they struck him with their hands. Was the centurion part of that group?

[ 20 : 54 ] Possible? So it is possible that he witnessed all of these events. But I cannot give clear, indisputable proof from the Bible that he did.

but that brings me to the indisputable evidence for some of the things that he saw and heard.

Matthew in his gospel relates the earthquake, the rocks were split, the graves were opened, and so on.

And then he goes on to say, so when the centurion and those who were with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and the things that had happened, they feared greatly.

In other words, these accompanying events that he saw and heard were a source of fear. Did this indicate that he was fearful of the consequences of what he had done in carrying out his orders?

Because more than likely, he was responsible for issuing the command to nail Jesus to the cross. He would have witnessed the meek submission of Jesus to this inhumane action.

[ 22 : 20 ] There is no evidence of struggle to escape, no evidence of verbal abuse aimed at the soldiers who carried out this act.

Here is one of whom Isaiah could write, hundreds of years before, he was oppressed and afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth.

He was led as a lamb to the slaughter and as a sheep before his shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth. The centurion, I would suggest, could not but fail to notice the calm demeanor of Jesus under duress.

The centurion would have heard the mocking taunts of those who surrounded the cross. He would have heard the mocking and initial remonstrations of both men crucified on either side of Jesus.

He would be aware of their characters and reputations. grace. Did he hear the marvelous message of grace addressed to one of the dying thieves?

[ 23 : 33 ] Assuredly, I say to you today, you will be with me in paradise. eyes. He saw the thick judgmental darkness that covered the sight from midday until three in the afternoon.

He heard the cry of dereliction that pierced the thick darkness. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? And Mark in his context, in this context, especially links the testimony of the centurion to his observation, of the manner in which Christ died.

Mark writes, Jesus cried out with a loud voice and breathed his last. So when the centurion who stood opposite and saw that he cried out like this and breathed his last, he said, truly this man was the Son of God.

In other words, the way in which Jesus died had a profound effect on the opinion of this man as to the identity of Jesus of Nazareth, he heard him cry with a loud voice and he saw him breathe his last.

Now remember, Jesus had been hanging on the cross for six hours, the third hour, nine a.m. in our time, in the morning, right up to the ninth hour to three in the afternoon.

[ 25 : 07 ] He heard Jesus cry with a loud voice. John tells us in his account that he cried it is finished in the loud voice, one word in Greek tetelestai.

Did the centurion understand the significance of what was said? Well, I wouldn't go as far as that. But certainly he found it peculiar that a weakened, dying person who had been suspended on the cross for six hours should have the energy to shout with a loud voice.

It's not what you would normally associate with someone who had been suspended on a cross for that amount of time. In the weakened condition to cry with a loud voice.

It's not even what we associate with the onset of death. John tells us in his narrative that Jesus bowing his head gave up his spirit and it suggests to us that it was a regal act on the part of Jesus as he gave himself to death.

[ 26 : 33 ] Unlike you or I, who will one day be overpowered by the power of death unless Christ comes first? Jesus gave himself to death.

There is a difference. You see, we fight death right up until our last breath. We struggle against the onset of death. But ultimately we have to submit to a power that is greater than ourselves.

But here is one who had power over death and he gave himself to death. The centurion saw and heard what transpired at the cross.

He may even have seen and heard what took place right from the moment of Jesus' arrest in Gethsemane up to the cross and beyond. What he saw and heard had a profound effect on his assessment of this person, Jesus of Nazareth.

What did he see and hear? Who was he? What did he say? And this question takes us to the very heart of the text. In the light of what he heard and saw, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, he speaks in glowing terms of the identity of Jesus of Nazareth.

[ 27 : 59 ] Many saw and heard what he saw, but it had no effect on them. Certainly not the effect it had on this man. Many people hear of Jesus Christ right up to the present day and you may be here, this afternoon.

But it has had no effect on you until now. Luke in his account tells us when the centurion saw what had happened, he glorified God saying, certainly this was a righteous man.

Luke's record suggests the centurion expressing words that exonerate the character of Jesus. While both Matthew and Mark's accounts are more a declaration of the identity of Jesus of Nazareth.

One account exonerating the character of Christ, the other two accounts setting before us the identity of this person who was on the cross.

And if we look at Luke's record of what is stated by the centurion, you can see how it exonerates the character of Jesus. Why do I say this? Well, think about it.

[ 29 : 12 ] For the very good reason that this form of capital punishment was reserved for the very worst crimes. It was true of two who had been put to death with Jesus.

So when the centurion states, this was a righteous man, in effect, he is stating that this person was innocent. One who may have been present from the very time of the arrest of Jesus, but certainly present at the cross, he has come to the conclusion that this man has been punished for a crime of which he is innocent.

What he saw and heard convinced him that he is utterly righteous, he is a righteous man. The thief who is brought to faith, he also comes to this conclusion.

One who is given the blessed assurance of where he will spend eternity. Remember what he said, we receive the duty word of our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong. The centurion is in full agreement without assessment.

He had seen enough to convince him that Jesus is innocent, he is a righteous man. What he saw and heard, convinced him he was undeserving of death.

[ 30 : 33 ] And Luke tells us that he glorified God. How? Well, he glorified him, you can say, by merely making the statement that he was a righteous man.

There are many ways by which we can glorify God. For example, when we say the same things that God says, we glorify God.

You see, you remember what Paul wrote writing to the Romans in the very first chapter of that great letter because although they knew God, they did not glorify him as God.

But you see, the assessment of the centurion concurs with the assessment of heaven that Jesus was a righteous person. When Jesus was baptized at Jordan, remember we are told, a voice from heaven, this is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased.

Christ himself says, I know that you always hear me. I do the things that are pleasing to you. Here is one who is supernaturally conceived in the womb of the virgin, righteous from conception, righteous as a child, righteous as a teenager, unaddled, and throughout all his sufferings, no unrighteousness of any kind can be found in him.

[ 32 : 07 ] And the centurion becomes convinced on the basis of what he has seen and heard that this person is not on the cross for the sake of any breach of the law.

The priests, scribes, and Pharisees who had condemned him and were gloating in his death were being challenged by the testimony of this centurion that they were guilty of putting a righteous man to death.

Was there not a danger that the testimony of this man would be carried back to those who had passed this sentence?

Was there not a danger that his testimony be carried back to his superiors? And ultimately to the governor that an injustice was being perpetrated?

And you know you get the impression rightly or wrongly that this centurion didn't care whether that report went back to his superiors or not.

[ 33 : 17 ] He is basing his judgment on what he had seen and heard. And not only does it by his testimony exonerate the character of Jesus of Nazareth, he goes further.

Truly this man was the son of God. He is not now just justifying the character of Jesus but he is setting before us the identity of this condemned person on the middle cross.

Not just merely a righteous man. He is the son of God. Remember how Mark begins his gospel.

The beginning of the gospel or the beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ the son of God.

There would be no good news if Jesus Christ were just a mere man. Even a righteous man. My sins and your sins could never be atoned for by a mere man.

Even a righteous man. Dying in your own place we require a substitute who is both God and man. And if this centurion were present in Gethsemane then he saw the display of authoritative power in the trials and crucifixion he would have seen how Christ conducted himself.

[ 34 : 33 ] And remember how the apostle Peter reminds us of this in his letter. He committed no sin. Nor was deceit found in his mouth who when he was reviled did not revile in return.

When he suffered he did not threaten but committed himself to the one who judges righteously. This man saw Jesus during these six hours on the cross.

He saw how disparagingly the chief priests spoke to him. They mocking with the scribes and elders. He saved others. He cannot save these.

He said let him save himself. Let him come down now from the cross and we will believe him and so on. No, it is not improbable but that the first thought of who Christ was was sold in the garden of Gethsemane.

Other thoughts followed as he viewed events of the actual crucifixion. He saw as it were heaven itself bearing witness to what was taking place.

[ 35 : 51 ] Split rocks, open graves. Did he understand what these things meant? I don't know but of this he appears convinced.

Certainly this was a righteous man. Truly this man was the son of God. What is so unheard? the testimony he gave.

Who was he? How does that speak to us finally? What has this got to do with us today? What does the testimony of the centurion say to us?

Can we not say that we have to reckon with this confession? Everything in the Bible supports and confirms the accuracy of the assessment of the centurion?

And that raises a question. If Christ is righteous and he is, if Christ is the son of God and he is, why is he on the cross dying as an unrighteous person in the Roman place of sinners?

[ 37 : 10 ] Could God not protect him and deliver him? Could he not have defended himself and saved himself? You know, we cannot pretend to ignore the question, why was Christ, why did he die?

Why was he placed on the cross? And you know, the Bible answers the question superbly. Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God.

