

TEXT: Mark 15:39

CUE 29—And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, heard his cry and saw how he died, he said, "Surely this man was the Son of God!" *NIV*

THEME: THE CENTURION, THE ASTONISHED

1. The Centurion Was Drawn to Jesus
2. The Centurion Gives Us Reason to Ponder Jesus' Sacrifice

Dear Fellow-Redeemed by the Blood of the Lamb:

CUE 30—He was a Roman soldier, an officer in charge of a hundred men. Very likely he had seen men die many times before. He had witnessed cruel crucifixions. He was disciplined and self-restrained, hardened and unemotional. He tended to be cynical in most matters.

But this time it was different. This time fear and wonderment gripped his soul, and he could not keep his usually emotionless presence masked in indifference. He exclaimed: "**Surely this was the Son of God.**" He became THE CENTURION, THE ASTONISHED.

CUE 31—THE CENTURION WAS DRAWN TO JESUS. As the centurion witnessed the whole scene, he was astonished and drawn to Jesus. He saw Jesus conduct himself on the cross with calm dignity. He heard the mockery against Jesus, including the taunts for Jesus to save himself if he were indeed the Son of God. He heard the words of Jesus on the cross, words of forgiveness, words of comfort, words to his Father in heaven.

He compared Jesus with all the others he had seen crucified, and there was no comparison. He saw the strange darkness while Jesus suffered there. He felt the earthquake when Jesus died. A deep religious fear passed over him. He concluded that Jesus was not a criminal. Jesus was a righteous man. "**Surely this man was the Son of God!**" the very Son the Jews refused to accept.

In that moment the pagan spoke as a believer. He saw in Jesus at his dying, what every enemy of Jesus from that day on has refused to see and has tried to deny: the divinity of Jesus Christ. That Jesus was the Son of God was everything the hostile Jews said he was not. There, under the cross, the Roman centurion, of all people, confessed that he saw the Son of God in the person of Jesus of Nazareth.

CUE 32—THE CENTURION GIVES US REASON TO PONDER JESUS' SACRIFICE. Oh, to see Jesus as the centurion saw him! Can you imagine yourself today standing at the foot of Jesus' cross, wondering about the man hanging there, a man so different from the usual criminal? Would you have recognized him? Would you have confessed him in that moment?

Put yourself there for the moment, in your mind's eye. Jesus is wounded from the scourging, the spikes have been driven through his ankles and hands, and he hangs in torment. The crowd is milling about taking delight in baiting him, mocking him, laughing him to scorn. A haunting darkness has enveloped the day.

CUE 33—You look up at him and what do you see? —a miserable wretch of a man who deserves only to be mocked and scorned? —a first century visionary who is being martyred because he stood alone for some high-sounding, revolutionary principles? —a criminal? —an innocent man dying unjustly who is, in fact, the Son of God?

What do you see? Only one answer is true. Do you see it in the man? Do you see something in his face? Does his dignified silence in the face of mockery strike you? Maybe you catch his concern for others while he is suffering: concern for his enemies, for his mother, for the criminal dying next to him. **CUE 34**—Do his words, “**It is finished**” reveal him to you? Does the moment of his death—his cry, “**Father, into your hands I commit my spirit**”—open your eyes to see him for what he truly is, the Son of God?

CUE 35—Would we have known him? We can't say for sure. But we know that the centurion has helped remove the offense of the cross for us. Through him, and to his own astonishment, we learn that when a person comes to the cross of Christ without a preconceived mind-set, without unbridled hostility, he can see that Jesus, the crucified Christ, is the Son of God. God's own Son died on the cross.

The centurion's confession helps us see the good in Good Friday, because it helps us see God in Christ. His confession helps bring the light back into the darkness of those hours. That he is seen as the Son of God gives meaning to Jesus' words, “**It is finished.**” He did the Father's will for our salvation, and through his death he won the victory over Satan and the powers of hell. Because the one and only Son of God gave himself in death on the cross, we can be sure that his death counted for us also.

Today we still preach Christ crucified, as Pastor Keller reminded us earlier this month. Our message today is the same one the centurion was astonished to learn: The Son of God sacrificed himself on the cross. And what the centurion could not have fully known in that moment, Jesus sacrificed himself to pay for the sins of all people. He finished the work of salvation. He died to give us life—a meaningful life on earth and eternal life in heaven.

Legend tells us that this centurion was named Longinus and that he continued to grow in faith in Jesus Christ and even died a martyr for his faith.

We don't know if that part of the story is true. But we do know that anyone who believes in the crucifixion of the Son of God, and holds that faith to the end, has the one and only Savior from sin, death, and the devil, and ultimately has an eternal home in heaven. We know that in three days the confession of the centurion had the stamp of heaven on it as Jesus rose from dead. We know that in Christ we have a new life, eternal life.

So today we remember the death of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, for the sins of all the world...but especially for your sins and my sins. May we always remember and glorify God and confess Jesus and continue in the faith to eternity. Amen.