

TEXT: Matthew 27:54

THEME: Jesus—The Son of God

Dear Fellow-Redeemed by the Blood of the Lamb:

During the Sundays in this Lenten season, we will view the sufferings, death and resurrection of our Savior beneath the banner of this theme: **JESUS—NAME ABOVE EVERY NAME**. We shall take a fresh look at our Lord's work of redemption through some of the names by which we call him—*The Son of God, The Christ, Our Prophet, Our Priest, Our King, The Obedient Servant*, and finally on Easter Sunday: *My Living Redeemer*.

We begin with **JESUS—THE SON OF GOD**. Today we hit the fast-forward button on the Lenten history to the scene of the Savior's death on Calvary in order to consider one of the most familiar names of our Lord, as it comes not from the lips of an apostle, but from the mouth of one who crucified Him. **When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, "Surely he was the Son of God!" (Matthew 27:54).**

The Biblical truth that Jesus is the very Son of God—the second Person of the Holy Trinity—equal with the Father and the Holy Spirit from all eternity—this is part of the ABC's of our Christian faith. **JESUS IS THE SON OF GOD**. This little lesson seems simple enough to those of us who have cut our teeth on the catechism. We read it in the text of the Bible countless times. We sing it in the familiar hymns. We say it in the time-honored prayers of the Church. We recite it in the majestic words of the Apostles', Nicene and Athanasian Creeds. **JESUS IS THE SON OF GOD**. But to hear this from the mouth of a non-Jewish soldier, a Roman centurion in charge of the crucifixion detail that day—that begs for an explanation.

There is probably a part of us who have studied the Scriptures for years—for entire lifetimes—that feels this Roman centurion could not have come to the conclusion that this man whose crucifixion he had supervised that day was the Son of the one true God of Israel. But consider this:

All through the long trial of Jesus, all day long beneath the cross, how had this centurion heard the term "Son of God" used? He had heard it from the Jews mocking Jesus. The Jews cared nothing for the Roman gods, nor for Caesar as some sort of god. When they taunted Jesus, saying: "If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross!" the Roman centurion, stationed at Jerusalem, knew very well what they meant by that. And when the Holy Spirit turned on the lights in this man's dark heart, he meant to contradict the mockery of the Jews and to clearly confess: **"Surely, he was the Son of God."** Consider something else. The Gospel of Luke tells us that the centurion also called Jesus **"a righteous man,"** acknowledging that Jesus was an innocent man wrongly put to death. And in saying this, says the Bible, the centurion **"praised God."** So this was an act of worship to the true God. Plainly, the centurion, along with the other soldiers, meant what he said: **"Surely, he was the Son of God."**

How did he come to this conclusion? The Gospel of Mark gives us a hint when it says: **"The centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, heard His cry and saw how He died..."** This Roman officer had seen a lot of men die. He had put a lot of men to death. I

suppose he was not much impressed by a lot of the pitiful pleas for mercy or the foul words pressed from the mouths of those into whom he drove the nails. It was all part of the job. But he had never seen a man die the way this man died.

From the cross, Jesus spoke seven times. The centurion was in a position to hear every word. Jesus prayed for the pardon of those who crucified him. He promised paradise to one of the penitent criminals next to him. He provided for the care of his mother, committing her to the care of the apostle John. He cried out in agony asking, “**My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?**” He asked for a drink that his throat might be clear to speak. He solemnly declared: “**It is finished.**” And then he bowed his head in utter peace, commending his sinless soul into the Father’s keeping—not taken in death, but taking death by storm like a conqueror. The centurion saw how Jesus died.

All that the centurion had heard and seen—as sometimes happens when the Holy Spirit makes his move in the human heart—comes crashing down in one thunderous avalanche of terrified contrition over all that he has been and what he has just done. And so, from the lips of this Roman soldier came a confession of faith uncaring of who heard him say it: “**Surely, he was the Son of God!**” Yes, he knew exactly what he was saying: “Jesus is the Son of God.”

But why is it so important to recognize that Jesus is the Son of God himself? So important that the Nicene and Athanasian Creeds were forged in the furnace of countless controversies, bloody persecutions and at the cost of many lives to maintain this mighty truth? Why is it so important to maintain that Jesus is the Son of God? Isn’t it because no one else can save us?

Have you ever found yourself bowing your head with a broken heart and a tired mind, sending words heavenward: “O God, dear Father, I have no answers to this. I don’t know what to do. I have no wisdom great enough to untie this knot. My back is up against it. I’m trapped. I can’t save myself. I can’t save my loved one. Dear God, save me!”

That’s why Jesus had to be God himself. What other kind of Savior would we want? What other kind of Savior do we need? We don’t need another hero with feet of clay like us. We need God!

Only God himself, tearing open the heavens and coming down, stepping onto our planet and into our lives, becoming our Brother, can save us. Who but God could bear the weight of a world’s guilt in our place and still come forth alive? Who but God could make his death count for every human being from Adam till Gabriel blows his trumpet? It is because the death of Jesus is mysteriously the death of God himself that you need never doubt whether the payment was enough. It is because Jesus is the Son of God that the grave could not hold him. It is because Jesus is God that the grave will not hold you and me either. It is because Jesus is the Son of God that darkness surrenders to light, a soldier’s heart melts into faith, and the strains of the Hallelujah Chorus will one day rise from the graveyards of earth. “**Surely he is the Son of God!**” Jesus—The Name Above Every Name. Amen.