

How
A
Particular
Cyrenian, a Criminal and a Centurion
were Converted
When
Confronted
By
The
Christ
Of
The
Cross
Of
Calvary

Sam Kurien
Grace Gospel Chapel
Erie, PA
October 7, 2012

Luke 23: 1-56

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THE CYRENIAN

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WHAT WE LEARN:

- The name of the bearer of the Cross is **Simon**

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WHAT WE LEARN:

- The name of the bearer of the Cross is Simon
- He is from Cyrene, i.e. modern day Libya, in Northern Africa
- He was **coming in from the country**, moving towards Jerusalem while **they went out** (i.e. Simon was walking in the opposite direction of the procession heading towards Golgotha)

WHY IS SIMON, AN AFRICAN, NEAR JERUSALEM?

- **WHO WAS HE?** Quite possibly, he was a Hellenized Jew.
 - The name Simon is Jewish, not Greek
- **WHY DID HE TRAVEL?** He very likely travelled from Cyrene to attend the Feast of Passover and possibly would stay at least until the Feast of Pentecost, about 50 or so days later, in Jerusalem.
- **WHERE WAS HE HEADED?** Simon was going towards Jerusalem while the procession taking Jesus to his execution was walking in the opposite direction.
- **WHAT DID HE LOOK LIKE?** It is possible, that Simon was dark in color (although this is not entirely clear, since there was a large settlement of Jews in Cyrene as part of the dispersion. He could have been olive-complexioned)
 - It was easy to distinguish this almost lone, possibly fit figure, walking towards Jerusalem, from the country
- **HOW FAR DID HE TRAVEL?** Simon very likely travelled 800-900 miles to get to Jerusalem
 - This trip in those days could have taken almost 1 month or more
 - Very few such trips could be undertaken in those days and therefore this trip was a precious one for this Jew who wanted to observe the feast in the city that the Jews consider most sacred, i.e. Jerusalem.
- **WHAT WAS HE GOING TO DO IN JERUSALEM?** He was most likely going to have a lamb sacrificed and observe the traditional Passover feast

SIMON WAS A MAN ON A TEMPORAL MISSION, WHOSE PLAN WAS DERAILED BY THE MAN ON AN ETERNAL MISSION!!!!

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- He was "seized"/ "laid hold of"/ "**compelled**"—i.e he was commandeered or conscripted or forcefully recruited to serve

THE CYRENIAN

**CAN YOU IMAGINE HOW SIMON MAY HAVE FELT?
HE WAS SO CLOSE TO THE WALLS OF HIS BELOVED CITY,
SO CLOSE TO HIS KINSMEN, SO CLOSE TO OBSERVING
THE RITES AND OFFERINGS REQUIRED BY HIS RELIGION.
SUDDENLY, HE IS SEIZED AND COMPELLED TO DO
SOMETHING THAT HE VERY LIKELY DOES NOT WANT TO
DO:**

The word “compelled” implies:

- authoritative force by the Romans**
- hesitation (and possible disgust) by Simon**

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- He **carried the cross of Jesus**

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- He carried the cross of Jesus
- He **walked behind Jesus**

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- He carried the cross of Jesus
- He walked behind Jesus
- He was the **father of Alexander and Rufus**, who appear to be well known to Mark’s readers

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SYNOPTICS VS. JOHN

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THE ANALYSIS:

TWO SCENARIOS ARE POSSIBLE:

1. Either Jesus carried the cross only PART WAY: John states that as Jesus went out, He was bearing His own cross. He likely carried the cross only until the city gates after which Simon was commandeered to carry the cross
2. Or, Jesus carried the cross the WHOLE WAY with Simon carrying part of the crossbeam, behind Jesus, thus Jesus would carry one end of the crossbeam on His shoulder and Simon would be carrying the other end

IS THERE A CONTRADICTION BETWEEN THE ACCOUNTS IN THE SYNOPTICS VERSUS THE ACCOUNT BY JOHN?

THE CYRENIAN

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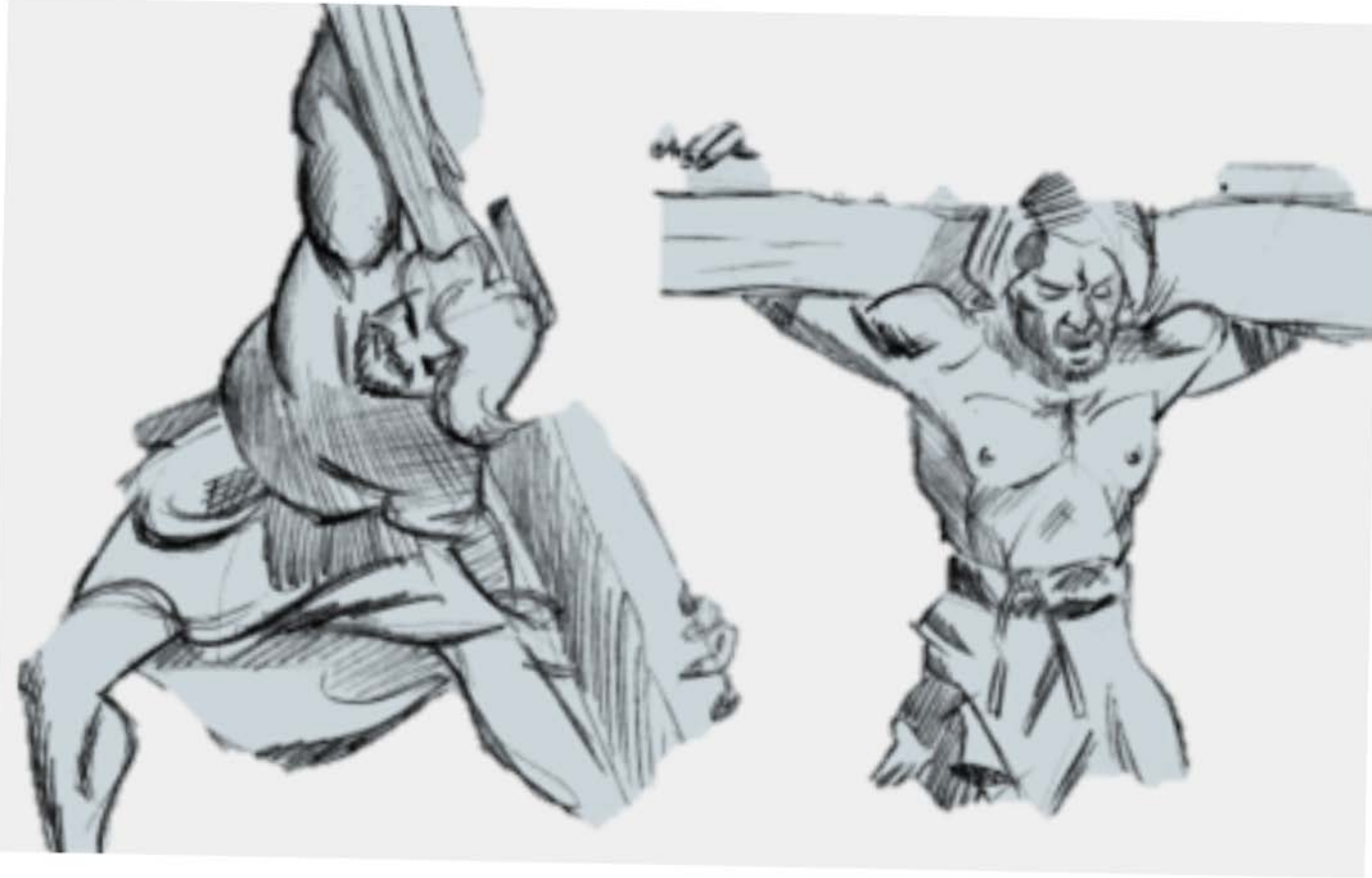
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PATIBULUM



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- **Romans 16:13** Greet **Rufus**, chosen in the Lord; also his mother, who has been a mother to me as well.

WHY WE THINK MARK WROTE TO ROMANS:

- There is External Evidence (beyond the Scripture) that supports Mark (John Mark) having written this gospel to a Roman Audience
 - One example is: Justin Martyr (writing about 150 AD) who stated that Mark wrote this gospel account in Italy to the Romans. Others ancient authorities confirm this view.
- Internal Evidence (within the structure of the gospel of Mark itself):
 - **OTHER EPISTLES** (Such as Colossians 4: 10 and 1 Peter 5: 13 place Mark in Rome)
 - **ARAMAIC TERMS EXPLAINED** (Mark 3:17; Mark 5:41; Mark 7:11, Mark 7:34; Mark 10:46; Mark 14:36; Mark 15:22, Mark 15:34).
 - **USE OF LATIN EXPRESSIONS (LATINISMS) INSTEAD OF GREEK** (Mark 5:9; Mark 6:27; Mark 12:15, Mar 12:42; Mark 15:16, Mark 15:39).
 - **USES ROMAN TIME SYSTEM** (Mark 6:48; Mark 13:35)
 - **EXPLAINS JEWISH CUSTOMS** (Mark 7:3-4; Mark 14:12; Mark 15:42).
 - **OMITS JEWISH ELEMENTS** such as the genealogies found in Matthew and Luke.
 - **FEWER REFERENCES TO THE OT**
 - **INCLUDES LESS MATERIAL OF INTEREST TO JEWISH READERS**—such as that which is critical of Jesus' critiques of the Pharisees and Sadducees (Sadducees are mentioned only once, in Mark 12:18).
 - **THE IDENTIFICATION OF RUFUS** When mentioning Simon of Cyrene (Mark 15:21), Mark identifies him as the father of Rufus, a prominent member of the church at Rome (Romans 16:13).
- All of this evidence supports the traditional view that Mark was written for a Gentile audience initially at Rome.

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MARK & PAUL'S RUFUS

- Mark identifies a Rufus as the son of Simon of Cyrene
- Paul identifies a Rufus as someone who is "chosen in the Lord" and whose mother was like a mother to Paul
- Mark writes to Romans and the manner would suggest that his readers (Romans) were familiar with Rufus (and Alexander)
- Therefore it is reasonable to think that the Rufus mentioned by Mark and that mentioned by Paul is the same Rufus (as many scholars believe)
- This means that something happened to Simon of Cyrene that was more than merely carrying Jesus' cross

WHAT POSSIBLY HAPPENED TO SIMON OF CYRENE

AFTER HE BORE THE CROSS FOR CHRIST?

- Was the Simon who took Christ's Cross and followed Him, remain the same old Simon, without any change?
 - If so, how can we account for his sons being familiar to the Roman Church and of Rufus being known to Paul?
- Was Simon in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost among the people of Cyrene who were present?
 - **Acts 2:10** Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome,
- Was the effect on Simon restricted to Simon alone? We know that men of Cyrene were preaching the Lord Jesus in Antioch—evangelists from Cyrene came to Antioch, indicating the presence of a church in Cyrene!!
 - **Acts 11:20** But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch spoke to the Hellenists also, preaching the Lord Jesus.
 - **Acts 13:1** Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.

MY CALCULATED CONJECTURE IS THAT SIMON WAS CHANGED AFTER HE CARRIED THE CROSS FOR CHRIST. SUBSEQUENTLY HIS FAMILY ALSO RECEIVED CHRIST AND HIS SON RUFUS BECAME A PILLAR OF THE CHURCH AT ROME.

SACRIFICE AND DISCIPLESHIP

- **Luke 14:26-27** "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not **bear his own cross and come after me** cannot be my disciple.
- **Matthew 10:37-38** Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And whoever does not **take his cross and follow me** is not worthy of me.
- **Matthew 16:24** Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and **take up his cross and follow me**.
- **Mark 8:34** And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and **take up his cross and follow me**.
- **John 12:24-26** Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. **If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also.** If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.

WHAT SIMON OF CYRENE ILLUSTRATES

- The yoke placed on us cannot be of our own doing—we are asked, nay compelled, to carry His yoke, His cross
- This would mean that we have to give up our own agendas and submit to His
- This would mean that we would have to sacrifice our own plans and submit to His
- The Christ who gives us REST also places his YOKE UPON US—a yoke that is easy and a burden that is light (Matthew 11: 28-30)
- When we carry the cross, we are becoming participants in His work.
- We may indeed carry the cross to an even greater burden—that of being executed
- No burden we carry is heavier than His
- Remember, even as Simon, we can only be behind Him. As long as we are behind Him, following His footsteps, He will lead us rightly—perhaps to greater challenges but ALWAYS TO ACCOMPLISH HIS PURPOSES
- WE cannot expect to be unchanged by submitting to His demands—at the end we are the ones that are blessed and He is the One who gets the glory

THE CRIMINAL

WHICH CRIMINAL?

Luke 32-43

Two others, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him.

And when they came to the place that is called The Skull, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on his right and one on his left.

And Jesus said, "**Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.**" And they cast lots to divide his garments.

And the people stood by, watching, but the rulers scoffed at him, saying, "He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!"

The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!"

There was also an inscription over him, "This is the King of the Jews."

One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!"

But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?"

And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong."

And he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

And he said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

Matthew 27: 38-44

Then **two robbers were crucified with him, one on the right and one on the left.**

And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads and saying, "You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross."

So also the chief priests, with the scribes and elders, mocked him, saying,

"He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him.

He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him. For he said, 'I am the Son of God.'"

And the **robbers who were crucified with him also reviled him in the same way.**

Mark 15: 27-32

And with him they crucified **two robbers, one on his right and one on his left.**

And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads and saying, "Aha! You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself, and come down from the cross!"

So also the chief priests with the scribes mocked him to one another, saying, "He saved others; he cannot save himself.

Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross that we may see and believe." **Those who were crucified with him also reviled him.**

TRY AND ANSWER THIS QUESTION:

Choose the ONE BEST (and only) ANSWER

Question: All of the following are true regarding THIEF ON THE CROSS, as recorded in the Gospels EXCEPT:

- A. Thief on the Cross went to either Heaven OR Hell
- B. Thief on the Cross was promised Paradise
- C. The soul of Thief on the Cross ceased to exist at death
- D. Thief on the Cross reviled/mockered Christ

HERE IS THE ANSWER TO THE QUESTION:

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What we learn about these criminals

- There were two of them
- They were crucified on his left and right, thus almost possibly equidistant from HIM
- At first they both reviled HIM
- In the end only one was left reviling, while the other was under conviction
- Both were close to HIM but only one was promised Paradise, the other was not

WHERE IS PARADISE?

- The Greek word refers to a GARDEN
- There are two other New Testament uses of this word:
- 2 Corinthians 12: 2-9—
 - Here Paradise is referred to as the THIRD HEAVEN, the very ABODE OR PRESENCE OF GOD
 - The FIRST HEAVEN has been understood as the ATMOSPHERIC HEAVEN
 - The SECOND HEAVEN has been understood as the STELLAR HEAVEN
 - The THIRD HEAVEN is the PRESENCE OF GOD
- Revelation 2: 7

In ALL 3 uses, Paradise is not a place such as PURGATORY that some denominations believe, but is Heaven itself, where God dwells.

THE UNBELIEVING CRIMINAL

- He did understand some theology—He understood -
-that the Christ could save—so He states that if
Jesus was the Christ, He should fulfill His task and
save him
- His statement indicates annoyance and unbelief
- We know nothing more about this Criminal—NO
promises are given to Him
- He very likely DID NOT go to Paradise (Heaven)

THE BELIEVING CRIMINAL

- He was initially a reviler just like the scribes and Pharisees, just like the soldiers and just like the other criminal
- He had a change of heart
- He acknowledges the need to fear GOD (He is indirectly saying that Jesus is God)
- He acknowledges that he is under sentence of condemnation
- He understands that his condemnation is deserved
- He understands that JESUS is Righteous
- He Implies the resurrection of Jesus
- He acknowledges the Kingship of Jesus And that the Messiah he sees suffering in front of him will establish His kingdom one day
- To Him Jesus Promises not only that He will remember his name **but that he will be with Jesus TODAY in Paradise (Heaven)**

Ultimately what was the reason that this Criminal went to heaven?

- A. His faith—this was the instrument that was necessary for his salvation
- B. Christ's Promise—this was the power that would land him in heaven
- The criminal did not have any time to do any good works
- The theology that states that we need to do certain things to go to God is in error.
- The apostle Paul reminds us that we are saved by grace through the instrumentality of faith and not of our own doing or due to our works:
- **Ephesians 2:8-9** For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

The nature of faith that JUSTIFIES

- An understanding and acknowledgment that we are sinners, just like this criminal acknowledged:
 - **Romans 3:23-25** for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.
- An acknowledgment that we deserve nothing but condemnation and death, just like this criminal acknowledged:
 - **Rom 6:23** For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.
- An acknowledgment that Jesus is righteous, just like this criminal:
 - **1Peter 3:18** For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit,
 - **1John 2:1** My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.
- FAITH IN CHRIST AND TRUST IN HIS PROMISES:
 - **Romans 10:8-10** But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.

Jesus was associated with 4 thieves:

1. Judas Iscariot—a **BETRAYER**—he was in charge of the money bag and helped himself to its contents (John 12: 6). He ended his life in suicide.
2. Barabbas—a temporary **BENEFICIARY**—he is described as both a murderer and a robber (Mark 15: 7; John 18: 40). He escaped prison for a season.
3. Un-named thief on the cross—a **BERATER**—he berated and insulted Christ, even as others did (Luke 23: 39). He was destined to hell.
4. Un-named thief on the cross—a **BELIEVER**—to him the promise was given, “Today shalt thou be with me in Paradise” (Luke 23: 43). He embraced the Christ and was promised Heaven.

Which of these **SINNERS** are **YOU**?

THE CENTURION

Luke 23: 44-47

It was now about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour, while the sun's light failed. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two.

Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, "**Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!**" And having said this he breathed his last.

Now when the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God, saying, "Certainly this man was innocent!"

Matthew 27: 50-54

And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit.

And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split.

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

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!"

Mark 15: 37-39

And Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last.

And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom.

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!"

Mark 15: 44-45

Pilate was surprised to hear that he should have already died. And summoning the centurion, he asked him whether he was already dead.

And when he learned from the centurion that he was dead, **he granted the corpse to Joseph.**

What we learn about this Centurion

- Matthew informs us that the centurion and his soldiers were keeping watch over Jesus
- It is very likely that this centurion was present with Jesus at least from the time of the final trial at Pilate's Praetorium to the culmination and aftermath of the crucifixion
- He was therefore witness and possibly participant to all that occurred at the trial—especially the scourging with the flagellum, the commandeering of Simon of Cyrene, the parting of Jesus's garments, the behavior of the crowd and the railing of accusations.
- He was also witness to Jesus's demeanor, his kindness in the midst of this cruelty
- He was witness to numerous witnesses stating that He was innocent—Judas, Pilate, Herod, Pilate's wife, the thief on the cross etc.
- He was witness to Jesus's 7 last sayings uttered from the cross

THE 7 STATEMENTS OF JESUS FROM THE CROSS:

- **Luke 23:34:** And Jesus said, “**Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.**” And they cast lots to divide his garments.
- **Luke 23:43:** And he said to him, “**Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.**”
- **Matthew 27:46:** 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?”
- **John 19:26–27:** When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, “**Woman, behold, your son!**” 27 Then he said to the disciple, “**Behold, your mother!**” And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.
- **John 19:28:** After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), “**I thirst.**”
- **Luke 23:46:** Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, “**Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!**” And having said this he breathed his last.
- **John 19:30:** When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, “**It is finished,**” and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

What we learn about this Centurion

- The Centurion was a witness to the manner in which Jesus died—a triumphant death
- The Centurion was a witness to the unnatural darkness, the earthquake, the opening of graves around him at or near Golgotha and the veil of the temple rending in two.
- Thus the centurion makes two statements:
 - A. Jesus is a righteous MAN (Luke)
 - B. Jesus is the Son of GOD (Matthew & Mark)
- The Centurion affirms both the humanity and deity of Christ
- The centurion has two reactions:
 - He “feared greatly” or “was filled with awe”
 - He also is noted to have “glorified” or “praised” God—Certainly his statements are no longer statements of reviling and accusations. These statement reflect the centurion’s amazement and wonder and acknowledgment of the grace and majesty of God.

Could the Centurion confess Christ as Son of God merely by human reasoning?

See Peter's Confession

Mat 16:13-17 Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "**Who do people say that the Son of Man is?**"

And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

He said to them, "**But who do you say that I am?**"

Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

And Jesus answered him, "**Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.**"

Could the Centurion confess Christ as Son of God merely by human reasoning?

See Paul's Statement

1Corinthians 12:3 Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says "Jesus is accursed!" and **no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except in the Holy Spirit.**

ONLY THE HOLY SPIRIT CAN CREATE CONVICTION THAT JESUS IS GOD'S SON

THIS IS WHY I AM CONVINCED THAT THE CENTURION WAS SAVED.

WHAT DID HE DO TO ACHIEVE SALVATION? NOTHING EXCEPT BELIEVE AND CONFESS.

HE BELIEVED AND HE CONFESSED. HIS CONFESSION WAS A CONFIRMATION THAT HE WAS ALREADY A CONVERT.

CHRIST'S PROGRAM, HIS PRESENCE, HIS PERSON

- The Cyrenian—He was given the privilege of being a participant towards **CHRIST'S PROGRAM (MISSION)**
 - **CARRY THE CROSS AND FOLLOW ME**
- The Criminal—He was given the privilege of being in **CHRIST'S PRESENCE**
 - **TODAY YOU WILL BE WITH ME IN PARADISE**
- The Centurion—He was given the privilege of getting to know **CHRIST'S PERSON**
 - **DO YOU REALIZE THAT I AM THE SON OF GOD**

An African, An Israeli and an Italian

- 3 nationalities
- Possibly White and Black
- Jew and Gentile
- One is governed by his religiosity, another by his antisocial behavior, and a third has rank
- All 3 needed the Savior
- All 3 saved by faith
- All 3 affected by the Cross and the Savior
- Already being lifted up He was drawing men unto Himself
- This is merely the beginning of a seismic spiritual wave that would cause a catastrophic spiritual “earthquake” on the day of Pentecost—the effects of which would ricochet not only throughout Geographic locations but across time
- First Jerusalem, then Judea, then Samaria would be brought under its supernatural power and it would continue to advance with colossal force until it would affect the uttermost corners of this earth

DO YOU THINK THAT YOU ARE HERE BY COINCIDENCE?

Sam Kurién
Grace gospel Chapel
Erie, PA
October 7, 2012



Isaiah 53:5

But he was pierced for our
transgressions; he was
crushed for our iniquities;
upon him was the
chastisement that brought
us peace, and with his
wounds we are healed

O, to See the Dawn (The Power of the Cross)

Oh, to see the dawn Of the darkest day
Christ on the road to Calvary.

Tried by sinful men,
Torn and beaten, then, nailed to a cross of wood.

This, the power of the cross:
Christ became sin for us;
Took the blame, bore the wrath
We stand forgiven at the cross.

Oh, to see the pain written on Your face,
Bearing the awesome weight of sin.
Every bitter thought, every evil deed
Crowning Your bloodstained brow.

This, the power of the cross:
Christ became sin for us;
Took the blame, bore the wrath
We stand forgiven at the cross.

Now the daylight flees; Now the ground beneath
Quakes as its Maker bows his head.
Curtain torn in two,
Dead are raised to life; "Finished!" the victory cry.

This, the power of the cross:
Christ became sin for us;
Took the blame, bore the wrath
We stand forgiven at the cross.

Oh, to see my name written in the wounds,
For through Your suffering I am free.
Death is crushed to death;
Life is mine to live, won through Your selfless love.

This, the power of the cross:
Son of God slain for us.
What a love! What a cost!
We stand forgiven at the cross.