

## The Witness of a murder / Witness Part I – 1

### What if you could make that one thing you did, that one thing that haunts you – go away?

*We have all done dumb things – Our younger years are full of those stories:*

*I hit golf balls off a balcony over a parking lot full of cars on a dare one night. It was a lot of fun for a moment in time, till I broke a side window I had to pay for. Amazing what you will do when you are not thinking about anyone else but you.*

*But I'm not talking about mistakes that cost you a hundred bucks or a little pride. I'm talking about that thing that has filled you with guilt & shame & regret ever since. I'm talking about that thing that right now – you have worked your whole life to hide from others and yourself. But as much as you try to hide it and forget it – you can't.*

*What if you could make that one thing you did, that one thing that haunts you – go away?*

**Is there something we can do that is so big and far reaching – that no one can make it go away?**

Together as a body, we began a prayer last week that I want to ask you join us in praying. The prayer:

**God awaken us to you.** *Awaken us to the greatness of who you are. Awake us in such a way that we see your great love for us like we never have and cause it to move us to love you and others like we never have. We are also asking God awaken others around us – to reach down and do what we can't – reveal & save.*

There are many ways God can answer this prayer. Today, I'm asking him to do that right now through the power of His Spirit and His Word that is right here before us in Luke 23. We begin a new series today entitled "Witness" that will take us thru the whole book of Luke. Luke was a doctor who meticulously recorded this account from the mouths of many eye-witnesses. We are going to begin at the death, burial, and rez of Jesus over the next 3 weeks bc it is the Easter season. After Easter we will jump back to Ch 1 and start the whole book from the beginning. Today: Luke 23:44, Jesus' death on the cross: the place where several witnesses will help us with the question:

**Is there something we can do that is so big and far reaching – that no one can make it go away?**

*That's our 1 question – our 1 truth we are seeking today. Let's ask God to awaken us and give us the truth to this question.*

**Is there something we can do that is so big and far reaching – that no one can make it go away?**

Luke 23:44-49 (ESV) 44 It was now about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour, 45 while the sun's light failed. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. 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. 47 Now when the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God, saying, "Certainly this man was innocent!" 48 And all the crowds that had assembled for this spectacle, when they saw what had taken place, returned home beating their breasts. 49 And all his acquaintances and the women who had followed him from Galilee stood at a distance watching these things. What a painful & powerful moment. *I'm praying against numbness to a story familiar story – if you know it well. I'm praying this would fall fresh as if this was a loved one you had lost. I'm praying that God would increase your love for Jesus in this moment & this would fall on you in power bc this IS speaking of someone who loves you and I.*

We will observe several that witnessed Jesus' death. Let's begin with the last of the witnesses mentioned in this account of Jesus' execution.

48 And all the crowds that had assembled for this spectacle, when they saw what had taken place, returned home beating their breasts.

- **crowds** – What had they seen? They came for a show- a bizarre show, a promise from leaders this was God's will to protect them. But something happened that they and the leaders did not expect. They were moved by the brutal death of a meek (*humble, yet powerful*) Jesus. **"when they saw what had taken place"** - they left in grief.

"Beating their chest" was a cultural way of displaying grief, at times it could mean repentance, but here there is no evidence of repentance - just sadness, even despair because they knew something more had happened here.

**March Madness is one of my favs.** *Basketball, upsets, and – buzzer beaters. They are so fun – for the winning side. But for the losing side – just sadness and despair. No – we should have won. No, pride - just ultimate sadness bc they laid it all out there. This beating of the chest was sadness and despair but of a different type. This was full of regret and what have we done?*

*The crowd was left stuck in our question – what have we done? Have we done something so big ... And they were stuck in sadness and despair. If you are honest, is this where you are today? If so – its ok, there is hope.?*

49 And all his acquaintances & the women who had followed him from Galilee stood at a distance watching these things.

- **followers** – Jesus was their master, teacher, friend, and scripture says they even began to believe he was the son of God who would save - but they never really understood that what he came to save them from was the sin. They mostly figured He would save them from their slavery to the Romans by a victory. *But now the Romans were killing him.* They had been near Jesus on the cross at one point. So close Jesus spoke to John & his mom. But now as death is a reality distance, fear, confusion, hopelessness set in.

*These followers, like most of us - didn't believe that what was going on in their heart was the greater - than what was going on around them. They wanted to be rescued from the crises out here, not realizing Jesus came to rescue them from a greater crises - a crises of the soul that keeps us trapped in guilt and shame - stuck in the question. Have I done something so big and .... So they left hopeless and confused not really sure how the death of Jesus has any affect on their life. Is this where you are today - not really sure how the death of Jesus really affects your life?*

Maybe your lost in crowd - full of regret or one Jesus' followers who believes in his death and resurrection but it has no impact on the guilt and shame you live in. Its ok - there are a few more witnesses that I pray God uses to open our eyes together. First the centurion: **9:00**

**47** Now when the centurion saw what had taken place,

- **centurion** - Romans soldier who led 100 men. Typically: 6 centuries = 1 cohort. (1. 2 cohorts in Jerusalem, 600-1200 men) In Jerusalem, there were many crucifixions. On the avg. during peace time - 100+ a year. During times of revolt like 70 AD there were 50 a day for two months. A centurion usually oversaw an official execution or crucifixion.

What had he seen by the 9<sup>th</sup> hour or 3 pm on this Friday? **44** It was now about the sixth hour

The centurion met Jesus early Friday in his 1<sup>st</sup> trial before Pilate - the ruler of the Roman occupying forces. But this was not Jesus' first trial. The night before, he was arrested by the Jewish temple guards in a garden called Gethsemane while praying with his disciples. He endures two trials by the Jewish rulers - where beatings, mocking, and lies occur. Friday morning, his trials begin at 6 am. He stands before the Jewish rulers again, but is quickly shipped off to Pilate in hopes they will give the execution order - bc under Roman occupation the Jews could not execute a man. This is where the centurion would have first met Jesus.

*He would have encountered a bound, beaten, & exhausted Jesus that Pilate, his leader, wanted nothing to do with. The Romans had long learned to leave the locals alone as much as possible as long as their Roman rule and peace was not threatened. The centurion would have seen the pleas from the Jews to see Jesus as a rebel set on overthrowing Pax Romana. But he would have also witnessed Pilate say, I find no guilt in this man - and shipped him off to Herod.*

Herod was a puppet governor for the Romans - a buffer in between the Romans and the Jewish leaders if you will. Pilate wanted Herod to satisfy the anger of the Jewish leaders but he did not - he could not bc he could not order him executed - so Jesus is sent back to Pilate. At this point, when our centurion receives Jesus into his custody for a second time, Jesus has walked 6 miles after leaving the upper room, he has stood before 5 trials, and this will be his 6<sup>th</sup>. He has faced physical abuse, mocking, and lies. Pilate again questions Jesus and declares he is innocent. He is no rebel to the Roman cause. But the leaders stir the crowd into a riot like chaos. What the centurion would have seen in Jesus - was **humility not the pride** of a rebel and a **peace not anger** like a radical would have toward a govt he hated, and **grace** - an uncommon love for his accusers that most rebels never possessed. Finally, Pilate in one last attempt to release Jesus tries to say I will punish and release him as is the custom of mercy during this Passover Feast. They don't want Jesus released. They want a **rebel** released & they win and Pilate gives up Jesus to be executed.

*Now - the centurion has a job to do. His job: to oversee Jesus' execution. For the Romans, executions had a purpose: to put fear into the people they ruled. So execution involved: public humiliation, the utmost savagery before death, and a long brutal execution - no quick execs. First he is taunted and beat by a group of Pilate's elite guard. Then he is stripped naked and flogged (an event that was used to kill in and of itself - but had been perfected so you could beat a man within an inch of death). The centurion would have overseen all of this. He is then re clothed and marched another mile outside the city carrying his cross beam to a trash dump called Golgotha - literally the "Place of a Skull". Luke tells us Jesus was too weak from the beatings and the miles covered during the last night to carry this piece all the way to the hill. Upon reaching the execution site, He is offered a mixture of wine and gall/myrrh. Both are narcotics meant to ease the pain and suffering. But Jesus refused the drink after tasting and realizing what it was. Jesus was then stripped naked and thrown on his raw back (wounds exposed to the raw wood beam) as an executioner strategically hammered nails in the soft spot of the wrist to fasten the arm to the beam. Not all crucifixions were done this way. Nailing was the most brutal because of the nerves that were severed as the bones and muscle wear torn. The feet were place on top of one another on a platform and nailed through with one large spike. The beam was then lifted up and placed on the vertical post - which was already in place.*

*The centurion had overseen all of this as a soldier with a job to do. He watched him absorb the overwhelming physical punishment and the verbal abused- even one of the criminals on a cross beside him - attacked. Yet, he witnessed in Jesus humility and grace. A grace that led him to forgive. He heard him speak forgiveness to his attackers, to his murders, ... to Him.*

**44** It was now about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour, **45** while the sun's light failed. From 12-3 pm what the centurion witnessed was the sky go black and what he would have witnessed in the darkness - in the last 3 hours of Jesus death was the sounds of a man struggling to breath - lit. choking on fluid in his lungs.

Matthew tells us as Jesus died there was an earthquake - the ground shook and rocks split. Luke and Matthew then both tell us the curtain that covered the entrance into the most holy place was torn. **45** And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. At the end, he hears Jesus cry out with one last act of humility. **46** "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!" **18**

This centurion, in 7-8 hours - had witnessed a life-time, of **hatred and grace**, of **pride and humility** of **horror and beauty**. And, God uses all this to awaken him to see Jesus as more than just a man. Listen to his witness:

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

Yes – his declaration **is powerful** – **this man was innocent**. But his declaration is more than just a statement that Jesus did not deserve this crucifixion. Notice what the scripture says before his declaration – **he praised God**,

This was more than just – “oh no, ... this man didn't deserve this.” **This - was an act - of worship.**  
**“praised” - to give glory, or declare the overwhelming greatness of someone**

At the foot of the cross, at the foot of the brutal murder of Jesus, our centurion who physically led this execution concludes: this was more than wrong, this was evil. And there at the feet of Jesus – **He worships** - an declares the overwhelming greatness of God. (*This same centurion in Matthew 27:54 (ESV) ... “truly this was the son of God!”*)

**Do you see it? Do you? The centurion's statement of innocence was way more than a description of the injustice that happened to Jesus – it was a description of who JESUS really was: Holy - God.**

**At the cross, in the midst of ultimate evil - the perfect, holiness of God is revealed. And, a Roman soldier of all people gives witness – declaring in an act of worship: Jesus is holy, God!**

*I'm sure at this moment the centurion thought: “This is awesome, and, oh man, ... I just executed Him.” I want to give my all to this God **BUT**: Did I just God just do something so big and far reaching – that no one can make it go away? Cory – intern, tears Jesus wants all of me and I want him, but I don't know. To stay meant reconciliation with family, dealing with a dad who abandoned him, and not running back to the road where the temptation to not live for Jesus had usually won. The next day – he left. He couldn't believe God, even holy all powerful God could do something so big and far reaching to make his guilt and shame go away.* Many of us are wrestling with this question. But there is hope ... !!!

*Listen to 2 others affirm the witness of this centurion and give his witness meaning for us – answering our question.*

• **Jesus and God the Father** (*Both were together at the cross – listen to their witness.*)

Jesus did not go to the cross –because he was guilty. The centurion knew this – hopefully you know this now as well. But Jesus knew he was going to the cross not bc he was guilty – but bc we were guilty.

**Mk 10:45 (ESV) J- “For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”**

**I Peter 3:18 (ESV) F- For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous,**

At the cross Jesus carried our sin and all its weight. In His humanity, Jesus felt the overwhelming weight of sin's guilt, shame, & punishment. The kind of unbearable weight that makes us ask the question - **is this so big and far reaching – that no one can make it go away?** The kind of weight that makes us feel God doesn't want anything to do with us. In his flesh – Jesus felt this as well. On the cross, the weight of our sin, our guilt and shame led Jesus in his flesh to believe God had left him. This is what sin does. This is what its fruit – guilt and shame do.

**Matthew 27:45 (ESV) J- “My God, My God- why have you forsaken me.”**

*But God had not and could not forsake or abandon His son, Jesus. (God is One [Father, Spirit, Son] The Father was w the Son the whole time.)* **II Corinthians 5:19 (NLT) F- For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, ... (IS 53)**

**People often say it was not the nails that held Jesus on the cross – it was his love for you. And, I will say yes to this. But when his humanity screamed this is too much in the garden – it was the presence of the Father and Spirit that empowered Him to remember – this is why you came, this is why you are here – and to empowered him to say – not my will but yours Father. And, on the cross – when his humanity screamed too much – the weight of this is too much, when he could have called for a 10,000 cohorts of angels – I believe God the Father was there, reminding Him – this is why we are here, I am with you, and I believe the Father held him there in His love. Thru the power of the Spirit – Jesus knew & experienced this love and spoke this in his last breath saying: God you are with me now.**

**Luke 23:46 (ESV) J- Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!”**

**WHY?** ... was God in/w Christ on that cross? **II Cor 5:19 (NLT) F- ...no longer counting people's sins against them.**

**The work of Jesus on the cross was done to declare us innocent, holy – so we could be with God.**

*The witness of the centurion – Jesus is innocent, holy God was affirmed and given meaning to us by God the son and God the Father who declare – because of Jesus' work, bc of holy son of God's work – you are now holy in Him.*

**What does this fully mean for us?**

**There is something Jesus has done that is so big & far reaching – that it blots out all we have done.**

**- We are not pardoned. Jesus fully satisfied God's judgment and punishment of sin**

One of the struggles we have in believing the work of the cross – is that, bc of Jesus' work we are not fully innocent before God. We don't feel right or righteous or holy before God. We more feel like we are pardoned.

**Jimmy Hoffa was pardoned – all knew he was guilty. Nixon was pardoned – all knew he was guilty. Cory felt this.**

**Do you feel pardoned? You are not. Like the centurion – see what Jesus has done for you and I.**

**- Jesus fully took our physical and spiritual punishment for our sin.**

Without the work of Jesus - Physically, we will suffer in an eternal fire for our sin. Spiritually, we will eternally carry the weight of guilt and shame that will never be removed. And we will not just feel the absence of God's presence - we will never know his joyful and loving presence for all of eternity.

**Jesus took all of this for us - in our place. This is not a pardon!**

- In Christ, we have His full identity (holy) so God's witness of us is: "this man, this woman is holy!"

As Jesus cried - **God you are with me** - So God is with you and no amount of guilt & shame will ever separate us.

**The temple curtain torn - was a visible picture of this.** We would not longer be separated from holy God bc we are now holy in Christ Jesus.

Since Jesus is innocent, holy God - His death in our place - gave us His innocence - His holiness and allow us to be with God.

**Is there something we can do that is so big and far reaching - that no one can make it go away? NO**

Today freedom from guilt and shame is yours.

There is something Jesus has done that is so big & far reaching - it has blotted out all we have done.

Trust your soul to his holy, perfect work - be rescued.

If you have - today - allow him to help you believe you are not pardoned in his work - but holy in Christ.

I believe, help my unbelief. Open my eyes - awaken me to see as the Centurion.

**Blessing:** Jude 1:24-25 (ESV) 24 Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, 25 to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.