

The Centurion's Testimony: Witnessing the Son of God

Good afternoon, everyone. Welcome to the auditorium at Calvary Road Baptist Church in Monrovia, California, located in what's known as Los Angeles County, in the state some call the People's Republic of California. It's a chamber of commerce kind of day—beautiful, lovely. We're glad you're here. It started out cloudy and chilly but turned sunny and very comfortable. Let's bow and go to the Lord in prayer. Father, we thank You for Your goodness. We appreciate the opportunity to resort to prayer, recognizing that if we were more aware of our utter dependency upon You, we would pray more often, with more intensity, more urgency. We are in constant need of what only You supply—grace for living, loving, and serving. Hear our prayers for beloved church members and friends: for Gary's quick healing, for Mike's family in their loss, for Ferine's recovery, for Joe's strength, for Jackie's upcoming surgery on Friday, for continued strengthening for Sakura and Nazarin to find an organ donor, for Brian, Jim, my friend Dan, Ronnie's ankle recovery, Mrs. Kim's delivery, and Greg Dixon's health issues. We also pray for other sick loved ones and our Through the Bible reading program. We're grateful for the privilege of being here and the responsibility of having a Bible in hand to read, study, and use to serve You effectively. Please bless us, we pray, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Ronald, would you close that door, please? Somebody turned on the air conditioning—I don't know why; we didn't need it. I was hoping for a normal, beautiful afternoon here in sunny Southern California. Please turn in your Bible to Matthew chapter 27. We're looking at the events that occurred at the time of and immediately following the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ—not just His crucifixion, as He was crucified about 9:00 a.m. and likely on the cross for nine hours, giving up the ghost around 6:00 p.m. We're examining the events simultaneous to and following that moment. I'm attempting to harmonize the four Gospel accounts, using Luke as our baseline since

it promises to be chronological. Matthew, Mark, and John are somewhat chronological but don't always commit to it, for reasons tied to their goals. It's crucial that we study these things.

Before the service, I was thinking about how we sometimes misconstrue the responsibilities God assigns. We live in an era where culture assumes four stages of life: childhood, adolescence, "tweeners" (where you move out, move back home, move out again), and adulthood. At the beginning of the 20th century, there were only two phases: childhood and adulthood. A third phase, adolescence, was introduced by secular psychologists, sociologists, and psychiatrists, like Sigmund Freud. Before about 1870, there was no such thing as adolescence. During the Civil War, Ulysses S. Grant, at age eight, began operating a 120-acre farm by himself—cutting trees, digging roots, plowing fields, harvesting. Once, someone criticized Grant's father for letting his 13-year-old son take a two- or three-week vacation, saying he was too young. The father replied, "He's more of a man than you. He's been running his own farm since he was eight without supervision." Back then, children anticipated and strived for adulthood because it meant they'd made it out of childhood alive. Freud introduced adolescence as a time when people have adult privileges without adult responsibilities—doing things without accountability. This affects how we raise children today. Some kids say, "I can't go to church because my parents don't take me or won't allow me." I know a boy who, in grade school, lived with his drunken aunt and uncle. He decided he didn't want to grow up like them and asked the neighbors to take him to church every Sunday. If there's a will, there's a way. Maybe we should take our cues from the Bible instead of culture. Amen.

We're studying the events surrounding Jesus' death on the cross and what followed. Let's start with Matthew 27:54. A centurion is a Roman officer responsible for about 100 soldiers, like a company commander in the Marine Corps or Army. He presided over the execution squad tasked with crucifying people. "Now when the centurion, and they that were with him, watching Jesus, saw the earthquake and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, 'Truly this was the Son of God.'" Last time, we looked at Luke 23:47, where the centurion saw

what was done, glorified God, and said, “Certainly this was a righteous man.” We noted three things: what he saw, what he did, and what he said.

This verse in Matthew overlaps Luke’s account but is more expansive. Luke records what the centurion saw, while Matthew includes “they that were with him”—likely the execution squad of four or five soldiers who tortured, nailed, and taunted. It might also include Herodians (Jewish collaborators with Rome), chief priests, Pharisees, or scribes on the Roman side. Matthew adds they were “watching Jesus, saw the earthquake and those things that were done.” Matthew notes they “feared greatly,” unlike Luke, who says the centurion glorified God. This suggests fear of God may motivate glorifying Him—the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Without it, you lack the beginning of knowledge or understanding, especially for eternity.

Matthew reveals a consensus: those with the centurion agreed, “Truly this was the Son of God.” This wasn’t just the centurion’s conclusion but likely included his squad, possibly some Pharisees, chief priests, or Herodians. This man was different from anyone they’d crucified. This provides corroboration from the best possible witness—the centurion, who had authority, a vantage point, and experience with crucifixions without being caught up in the act itself. He oversaw the squad, not pounding nails or scourging, making him a reliable observer.

Turn to Mark 15:39: “And when the centurion, which stood over against him, saw that he so cried out, and gave up the ghost, he said, ‘Truly this man was the Son of God.’” Mark’s account is briefer but adds that the centurion “stood over against him,” meaning he was nearby, not aloof. He was interested and close, enhancing his credibility as a witness.

Now, Luke 23:48-49: “And all the people that came together to that sight, beholding the things which were done, smote their breasts, and returned. And all his acquaintance, and the women that followed him from Galilee, stood afar off, beholding these things.” The Gospels provide various scenes. Imagine you’re a director pointing the camera. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John paint word pictures of concurrent or subsequent events in the physical realm (darkness, earthquake) and

spiritual realm (graves opening, some rising after Jesus' resurrection). The camera shifts from the earthquake to the temple's veil tearing, then to the centurion, then to those with him, and finally to the civilians witnessing the crucifixion.

The "professionals" include the Romans, chief priests, Pharisees, scribes, and Herodians. The "civilians" in verse 48 are the Jewish crowd that followed every crucifixion, weeping and sorrowing, plus religious pilgrims in Jerusalem for Passover from regions like Mesopotamia, Spain, France, Italy, North Africa, and the Saudi Peninsula. They'd heard of Jesus and, curious, rushed to see His crucifixion. Verse 49 refers to those who knew Jesus—His acquaintances and women who followed from Galilee, some supporting Him financially or spiritually. At least John was there, as Jesus spoke to him from the cross, possibly others like His mother or half-brothers.

Verse 48 notes the crowd's reaction—smiting their breasts and returning—while verse 49 records no reactions from those who knew Him, only that they stood afar off, watching. The crowd hated seeing a Jew crucified by Romans, haunted by what they witnessed. They'd learn He was the prophesied one who rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, tried unjustly, and worked miracles. This sparked haunting memories, reflection on God's Word, and national guilt. Three days later, word spread that He rose from the dead, confirmed by an empty tomb. Many of these were among the 10,000 Peter preached to on Pentecost, with 3,000 converted.

In verse 49, "all his acquaintance" aren't called disciples, perhaps to distinguish them from the crowd in verse 48. Their experience was more personal. Mark 15:41 notes these women followed Jesus in Galilee, ministering to Him—perhaps with food, offerings, or lodging. They served without needing recognition, and God took note. They stood afar off, possibly due to modesty (Jesus hung naked, unlike artistic depictions), the wrongness of the event, or aversion to the Romans. They couldn't abandon Him but stayed distant, stunned and in shock.