

## Matthew 27:54-56 “Responses to Jesus’ Death”

9.2.18

We’ve reached the end of Jesus’ life. It’s 3 pm on Friday afternoon. Jesus is dead on a cross, on a skull-shaped hill outside of Jerusalem called Calvary.



Jesus has just cried out: “Father, into your hands, I commit my Spirit.” And with those words, He breathed His last and died. Darkness that had covered the earth for the past three hours began to disappear as the light returned. Dust and dirt could be seen (filtered in the air) because of a massive earthquake. There was a strange smell in the air of crushed rocks and dirt...the screams of the people were heard now more...now only the shuffling feet, scurrying from this place. The dust was settling... ***The Light of the World, Jesus Christ, had been snuffed out*** because of sin...yet, sin had been conquered by the sinless One. His job was now finished! **Follow along with me as we pick up in verse 54 together.**

### **Matthew 27:54-56**

<sup>54</sup> 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!” <sup>55</sup> There were also many women there, looking on from a distance, who had followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to him, <sup>56</sup> among whom were Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Joseph and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.

In what we just read are found **The Four Responses to the Cross**. At first glance, it may not appear to be so. But, it’s true. Within those 4 verses are 4 responses to the cross. Here they are:

### **The Four Responses to the Cross**

- 1. Unbelievers who believe**
- 2. Believers deeply devoted**
- 3. Unbelievers who refuse to believe**
- 4. Believers living in fear and shame**

Church family, and all who are here today, I must tell you...You and I fit into that list somewhere. Today...at this very moment...you are on that list. You are either an unbeliever or a believer...and you have two responses within those categories. Which are you? We’ll find out this morning... **Let’s begin**... Response #1 to the cross: **Unbelievers who believe.**

### **Matthew 27:54**

<sup>54</sup> 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!”

What an amazing scene for these soldiers at the cross. See this depiction...



They have been part of dozens and dozens, maybe hundreds of crucifixions... But, **they** have never seen anything like this one... Now, I say the word: "They" and accentuate it because it is very important that we not miss this. Matthew says, "when the centurion and those who were with him...saw what took place...THEY were filled with awe and said, 'Truly this was the Son of God.'" It's **THEY! Not just he.**

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Now I say that because in Mark's Gospel (which is the recording of how the Apostle Peter saw things), we see only the centurion speaking... (see the screens):

**Mark 15:39**

<sup>39</sup> 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!"

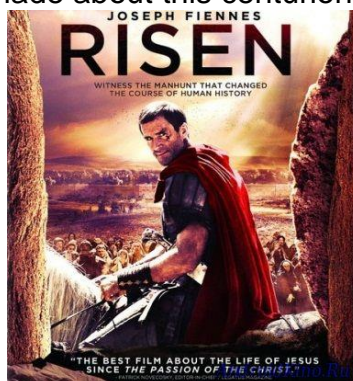
Luke's Gospel is similar...

**Luke 23:47**

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

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You know there have been movies made about this centurion. The most recent one was called:



(***By the way***, a powerful movie. We showed it here about 1 ½ years ago.) Now, I want to make a point I've made many times before...but, it's important we understand. We need to be careful to interview everyone at the intersection. Like this... See the picture of a 4-way intersection:



If there was an accident at that 4-way intersection, the police would want to interview each eye-witness from their different angles and perspective at the intersection. That's why we have four Gospels. And when we're reading an account in one...we need to read the account in the other gospels. You see, if you only read Mark and Luke, you would think only the centurion said, "Truly, this was the Son of God." But, if you read Matthew's account you see it was: "THEY." **See it again:**

**Matthew 27:54**

<sup>54</sup>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!"

Now you might have a little number beside of the word "the" in the last part of that verse. And the notes could say, "a" Son of God. There's no problem with this because of the Greek construction. The words in Greek are "WEE-os Thay-OS" (Huios Theos). It means "Son of God." No, the definite article is not there... "a" nor "the" it isn't there...but, it's not required. It's the same words (WEE-os Thay-OS) as used in...

**Matthew 14:33**

<sup>33</sup>And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

So, make sure there is no confusion, the centurion and the soldiers said the same thing as the disciples... "this was God's Son." **Now think with me about these soldiers...**



these men who have gambled for the clothes of Jesus. They are Romans, they are pagan...and they are likely ignorant of who Jesus is. He's just another deranged criminal...mentally unstable...a bizarre character to them. They have toyed with Jesus... (image:)



They placed a crown of thorns on His head...gave Him a reed for a scepter and then mockingly bowed at His feet saying, "Hail! King of the Jews!" They beat Him mercilessly with a cat-of-nine-tails...



Spit on Him! He's nothing to them. As I've studied over the last several weeks, I have become more and more intrigued with these soldiers. Who they are, where they come from, what they might have thought? I discovered this group of soldiers, led by this centurion, could have been part of Pilate's personal group of soldiers who came with Him from Caesarea. See this map...



Caesarea (see on left side of the map)? It's by the Med. Sea and is 60 mi. north n/w of Jerusalem.

Caesarea was where Pilate lived. It's where the governor's mansion was... And it's there that Pilate had his own special group of soldiers, led by a centurion. (As a reminder: a centurion is a Roman soldier with 100 men at his command.) It's so interesting, Bible scholars have hypothesized that this group of soldiers likely came with Pilate to Jerusalem during the Passover...to protect him. Remember, during the Passover in Jerusalem there are over 2 million people milling around.

If that's true...then this centurion as depicted here...and his men...could have been at the...



Praetorium, when Jesus was brought before Pilate and the people. See the centurion behind Pilate, beside of Barabbas? Perhaps, he and his men had witnessed the events of Jesus' mock trials from the beginning. This group would have led Jesus from the Garden of Gethsemane to the house of Caiaphas the High Priest, to the Chamber of Hewn Stones in the Temple to Pilate to Herod and back. Perhaps it was the centurion that passed the note from Pilate's wife to Pilate that said, "Have nothing to do with this man...He is innocent."

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Perhaps the centurion and his men have seen it all. Witnessing how unfair all of this has been. No justice...no objectivity...there's been nothing moral about any of this... Yet, they have their orders...



see that He's crucified! And that's what they've done. Now He's dead. But, OH MY they've never seen anything like what they've just witnessed. Matthew records they were in AWE! (vs 54). That's the Greek word: **Pho-bee-ah**, where we get the English word phobia meaning: "Fear." It's the same word used in Matthew 14 for the disciples when Jesus was walking on water...

**Matthew 14:26**

**26** But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, and said, "It is a ghost!" and they cried out in fear.

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These soldiers are in awe, because they're scared to death: Phobia! What they've seen is absolutely astounding and terrifying! They've experienced pitch darkness for the last three hours, in the MIDDLE OF THE DAY...and the dust is still settling to the earth because of a massive earthquake, so powerful and SO VIOLENT that it tore a 60-foot tall curtain from top to bottom in the Temple and caused graves to open in the cemeteries.

These soldiers have watched Jesus offer forgiveness from the cross to THEM... His crucifiers! "Father, forgive them...for they know not what they do..." They've seen Him talk to a thief with such compassion and love, "Today you will be with me in Paradise." They've seen Him take care of His momma...



No! This was not an ordinary man...He's no criminal... He's innocent! NO this is not ordinary man at all! This is: "Truly this is Son of God!" **Now church, I'm not going to stand here** and tell you I know for sure that the centurion was saved or that the other men under his command were all saved, but I do know what the Bible says in 1 John 4:14...which was written by the Apostle John who saw all of this happen at the foot of the cross. He said:

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### **1 John 4:14-15**

<sup>14</sup> And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. <sup>15</sup> Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.

That centurion and those men confessed, "Truly, this was: Son of God." Again, Church...you decide...but, I'll tell you this...I won't be surprised if I meet men in heaven who tell me they came to Christ literally at the foot of the cross. I believe the response of many of these men was response #1:

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### **The Four Responses to the Cross**

1. **Unbelievers who believe**
  2. **Believers deeply devoted**
  3. **Unbelievers who refuse to believe**
  4. **Believers living in fear and shame**
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And that leads to response #2. **Believers deeply devoted.**

### **Matthew 27:55-56**

<sup>55</sup> There were also many women there, looking on from a distance, who had followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to him, <sup>56</sup> among whom were Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Joseph and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.

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I love this...the women at the cross...they represent the 2<sup>nd</sup> response: "Believers deeply devoted." Women...women who had followed Jesus from Galilee. They had made the 90-mile journey south for the Passover and they were following Jesus and taking care of Him, "MINISTERING TO HIM."

### **Mark 15:41**

<sup>41</sup> When he was in Galilee, they followed him and ministered to him, and there were also many other women who came up with him to Jerusalem.

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Let me tell you what that phrase "ministering to him" in Matthew's account and Mark's account means in the Greek. It's actually one word: **Diakoneo** and it's the word for Deacon. They were being Deacons to Him. They were caring for His needs. **You know...we've got Deacon election next Sunday.** I can't make this stuff up. And we're talking about the word **Diakoneo** this morning.

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**I want to you to turn to Luke, chapter 8.** As you turning let me remind you as you vote next Sunday for the five men who will serve for the next three years, could I ask you a favor...please vote for men who have time to serve...to minister, and the heart to minister. That might not always be the most popular or well-known person. Church, with a church family our size, we need men who have the heart and the time to serve. We had 704 people last week: It's a load!

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These women were **Diakoneo**. They were ministering and helping Jesus by caring for Him and the disciples. And I believe they were providing meals, hospitality and financial support for Jesus' ministry. I can back that up from Luke 8:1-3.

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### **Luke 8:1-3**

<sup>1</sup>Soon afterward he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. And the twelve were with him, <sup>2</sup>and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, <sup>3</sup>and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's household manager, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their means.

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You see, it was a great group of women who were providing for Jesus in His ministry. And it was the women who were at the cross. Women... The first person Jesus ever told that He was the Messiah was a Samaritan lady sitting at well (John 4). The first people to the tomb after His death, were women (John 20). And the first person He ever appeared to after His resurrection was a lady, Mary Magdalene (John 20). Women... **The glue that holds things together!** These ladies at the cross were not intimidated by the Romans or the Chief Priests... They were not worried about being arrested... They were there for Jesus in His time of need...ministering to Him.

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Listen, it costs to be a follower of Jesus and it's not always safe. But, those costs are so worth it. The tables are turned today. Jesus ministers to us. He's our Good Shepherd, as Jason shared Wed. night. Oh, these women...they're hopes had been crushed, their dreams seemed dead...Jesus was on the cross...



all seemed lost. But, there still there. They're loyal. They're devoted! They don't mind being identified with their crucified Christ! They're courage is so beautiful.

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And so it is today. It will take devoted loyalty and courage to follow Jesus in our day, today. For those ladies at the cross...they heard the scorn and the derision of the religious leaders. They might have even been spit on by Caiaphas and the other priests! You know they were easy to spot...followers of Jesus...people had to recognize their tears...the pain on their faces... They heard the taunts...maybe even directed at them, "Are you with Him...Oh, you're so pathetic." And that's what the world can do to followers of Christ. But, can I ask you this: Did you read that they lashed out? Form a protest? No. They simply followed Jesus quietly...seeking to minister to Him.

How do we minister to Jesus today? Well, it's very easy. We just do what He tells us. We show up where He tells us to...we GO and make disciples. We carry our crosses daily. We love people...even people we don't understand...people who may hate us or not understand us. Katy, my daughter, sang about it beautifully Wednesday night, "They'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love. Yes, they'll know we are Christians by our love." Response **#2 Believers deeply devoted.** #3...

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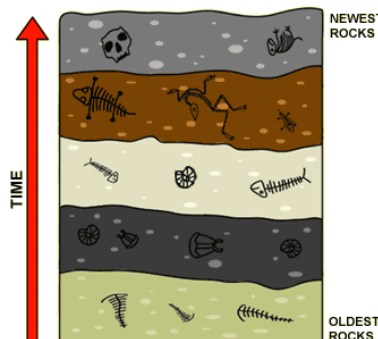
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You say, "Where are they in the Scripture?" I told you earlier, you won't see them all in the passage. But, they're there. In the white spaces of verses 54-56. We've seen them throughout the last week of Jesus' life... These men...and these in the crowd who shouted "Crucify Him"...see the image...



Those who wouldn't believe! They jeered and mocked at the cross! "He saved others, let Him save Himself." Listen...they saw the same evidence that the soldiers saw. They saw the same evidence as the women had seen. Many of these religious leaders and the people in the crowd had seen or heard about the miracles of Jesus. Yet they refused to believe. Same evidence...different response. Just like this... What is that?



That's the Fossil Record. Buried, dead things. What do you see? For, Creationists we see, "Creator God...who created all things...and then because of sin...all of those fossils, buried things, came into being because of Noah's flood," but for Evolutionists...looking at the same evidence they see a Big Bang...evolution...millions of years...no Creator. Same evidence...totally different responses. The same is true at the cross!

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But, I did notice something about the crowds from Dr. Luke's perspective at the intersection... See the screens...

**Luke 23:47-48**

<sup>47</sup> Now when the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God, saying, "Certainly this man was innocent!" <sup>48</sup> And all the crowds that had assembled for this spectacle, when they saw what had taken place, returned home beating their breasts.

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Do you know what that phrase means: "beating their breasts?" It's what this guy was doing...



Remember the sinner and the Pharisee... The sinner beat his chest in remorse and repentance, while the Pharisee smugly, "I thank God I'm not like him." Some in the crowd went away repentant... Do you see? I believe some were saved in the crowd as well! But others walked away. Same evidence...different response.

Oh, how I wish that wouldn't happen here today. Oh I wish there would be only one response: Calling out to Jesus in humble repentance...beating our chests for salvation. Does that need to be you? Oh that you would call on Him today!

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And that brings us to the last response:

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They, too, are in the white spaces. Who? Who are these believers living in fear? Well, let me ask you: Where are all the disciples except for John? They had run away, right. They all fled. Even the leader, Peter, who denied Jesus three times...you would have thought he would have come to the cross. You would have thought when Peter laid eyes on Jesus as Jesus was being led from Caiphas' house...



as the rooster crowed...surely, he would have been there. But, he wasn't. He was still living in remorse. And that remorse led to shame and that shame led to fear.

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But, you know, Jesus told Peter all of this would happen...but, I want you to see Jesus' encouragement even before Peter denies Him.

**Luke 22:31-32**

<sup>31</sup> "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, <sup>32</sup> but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers."

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Did you catch that... "And when you have turned again..." Listen, this is so encouraging...Jesus told Peter...you're going to be okay. Listen, Christian...you don't have to keep living your shame. He's praying for you, Christian! Can you believe that! Oh, don't live in the shadowy background of fear and shame! There's no joy in that. There's no power in Shadow Living. It's just pain and shame. Don't take the bait! Jesus says: "Come home...turn around."

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**Listen...as we begin to close...this is so beautiful...**

Can you comprehend the grace of Jesus? The mercy of Jesus... Christian...He's praying for you right now and unbelievers...He died for you and He offers forgiveness to you...if you will come to Him in repentance. Never forget **this: Jesus offered redemption to His crucifiers! He offered salvation to these men...**



those who beat Him, spit on Him, mocked Him...crucified Him! You say, I'm too evil...I'm too messed up...I'm unredeemable! No you're not! Those are lies from Satan...and the Romans soldiers prove that! **Anyone can be saved!** Do you know what Jesus said right before He died... He said...

**John 12:32**

<sup>32</sup> "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself."

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The great songwriter Chris Tomlin has written the song we'll be singing in the invitation in just a moment. It's titled:

**"God of Calvary" by Chris Tomlin**

*On the hill of Calvary*

*The Light of all the world*

*With the world on His shoulders*

*The weight of all our shame*

*On Him who knew no sin*

*A Holy surrender*

*The sky went dark*

*The Angels wept*

*The Father looked away*

*The final breath*

*He bowed His head*

*The lamb of God was slain*

*By His wounds I am set free*

*By His blood I've been redeemed*

*The great divide He crossed for me*

*Oh, praise the God of Calvary*

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The four responses to the cross...you and I are found within those responses:

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- 

My encouragement to you today...is to be like the soldiers #1 or the women #2.