

Series: **Power and Passion of Jesus** – week 4

CDOBC – beginning on 3/26/17

Today's Title: **"A Logical Conclusion"**

*April 16, 2017 - Matthew 27:54; Mark 15:39; Luke 23:47*

**Easter Sunday**

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**OBJECTIVE:** To share the eyewitness testimony of the Roman Centurion and encourage people to believe the evidence which proves Jesus is the Son of God - the Savior for all who believe.

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***Opening Prayer***

Who do American's consider trustworthy and honest?

Athletes? Celebrities? Politicians? Pastors?

In 2010 - the publication Scientific American conducted a survey - on a scale of 1 to 5 (5 is best), they asked: *"Of these 8 groups of people, who do you trust to provide accurate information about important issues in society?"* 2 of the 8 groups were ministers & politicians.

Who do you think scored higher?

Politicians scored higher than ministers!

In 2013, Reader's Digest conducted a poll: Which celebrity do you trust more?

(<http://www.rd.com/culture/readers-digest-trust-poll-which-celeb-did-you-trust-more/>)

Google's **Larry Page** or Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg?

Gameshow hosts: **Alex Trebek** or Pat Sajack?

Late Night TV: Dave Letterman or **Jay Leno**?

NBA stars: **LeBron James** or Kobe Bryant?

NFL Quarterbacks: **Eli Manning** or Tom Brady?

(BTW - the only minister to show up on the Reader's Digest poll (top 100 trustworthy people): #67 - Billy Graham)

Trusting what someone says - trusting their integrity and honesty is a big deal.

Trust is integral to our legal system.

-A courtroom is a dramatic place.

-It's a place where futures are determined.

-It's a place where freedom is awarded, or it's taken away.

-A courtroom is a place where facts are considered and evidence is weighed, and a decision of 'guilty' or 'not guilty' is determined based on the evidence presented.

-Do you trust what the witness is saying?

Trust is also integral to issues of faith.

Every year - in the weeks leading up to Easter, when you stand in line at the grocery store, every year you see the same stories in magazines, posing questions about the truth of Easter, the truth of Jesus's death on the cross, the truth of the Resurrection - can you trust these articles and cover stories?

As our culture has moved further from Christian belief and teaching, there is no longer agreement in the culture of who Jesus was or what He has done.

What this does is put each of us in the position of judge or jury. Whose testimony do we trust?

The witness presents the facts - the evidence in the case - but the judge or jury has the responsibility of making a judgment based on the evidence presented. A judgment of “guilty” or “not guilty” must be decided.

If a jury cannot come to a decision, it’s called a ‘hung jury’, and they most often have another trial with a new jury.

As we think about Easter - as we think about the crucifixion and resurrection, each of us must consider the evidence of Christ - and we must make a decision. We cannot say, “*I don’t know*” or “*I’m not sure*”. We cannot be our own hung jury!

A decision must be made - the evidence must be considered.

When we consider the evidence for faith and belief - the Christian faith and the claims of the Bible, we find ourselves in the role of judge or as a member of the jury.

- A person is a Christian - not because they were born into a Christian family...
- A person is a Christian - not because they have embraced the weekly practice of attending to church.
- A person is a Christian - not because they have certain moral and ethical standards.
- A person is a Christian - because they have considered the evidence of Jesus, and have decided based on the evidence they have heard - they have put their faith/belief in Jesus.

They have decided: *“I believe what the Bible - the evidence says about Jesus.”*

They have said, *“I believe in Jesus.”*

They have said, *“I will commit my life to Jesus.”*

Having faith doesn't mean you don't have any questions or any doubts, but it means the truth you know is sufficient for you to believe - and you will continue to seek answers for the questions or doubts which remain.

This morning, won't you consider the evidence for Christ?  
Won't you weigh the evidence and decide to believe in Christ?

**Hebrews 11:1**

“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”

Assurance. Confidence - Certainty - Security

The person of faith is assured in their belief, even convinced of the reality of the “things not seen” - because the evidence they have seen has made them confident in the truth.

Each of us must decide on the facts - the evidence we hear.

This morning, I want you to listen to the eyewitness testimony of someone who was not only at the crucifixion of Jesus, but someone who had the blood of Jesus on their own hands.

The Roman Centurion was a soldier who achieved a level of promotion which placed them in command of 100 men.

They normally worked their way up the military ladder by their loyal and capable service. They were men known as much for their integrity and honesty as their fighting ability. In the Gospels, we have the record of Jesus interacting with a Roman Centurion.

In **Matthew 8:5-13** (also **Luke 7:1-10**), a centurion comes to Jesus, tells Him “Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, suffering terribly.” Jesus says, “I will come and heal him.” The centurion replies, “Lord, I am not worthy to have You come under my roof, but only say the word, and my servant will be healed.”

Jesus was amazed at this man’s faith - and praised his faith as the greatest in all of Israel!

The other accounts of Roman Centurions in the book of Acts also reflect well on their character and acts of faith.

All this to help you realize, a Roman Centurion was a well-respected and accomplished soldier, even by many in the land of Israel, in which the Romans were an occupying force. In the Gospel accounts, **Matthew**, **Mark** and **Luke** all record the words spoken by the centurion who led the execution squad. No doubt this centurion, and the soldiers he commanded were hardened and calloused to the evils and horrors of crucifixion. You can be sure they had heard anything and everything from both the victims hanging on their cross, as well as the people watching or walking by the crucifixion site.

The centurion was an eyewitness to the events of Jesus's crucifixion.

He was not a biased witness. If he was biased, he was probably biased against Jesus.

We're not sure about everything - there are some "things not seen" in the Gospel accounts of Jesus' crucifixion.

- For instance, we don't know how long the centurion and the men he commanded in this execution squad were with Jesus that day.
- Were they with Jesus from early morning when Jesus was first brought to Pilate?
- Were these soldiers the one's who so viciously whipped / scourged Jesus until the flesh of his back was gone?
- Did they mock Jesus as a king and come up with the idea of the crown of thorns?
- Or...were those horrific and torturous acts done by another group of soldiers, and this centurion and his squad was waiting at Golgotha because they were experts and efficient at the cruel practice of crucifixion?

We simply don't know - and any further discussion would simply be conjecture.

**Let's stick to the facts - the evidence we do know.**

When Jesus and the 2 criminals who were condemned to be crucified arrived at Golgotha, they were promptly stripped of their clothes and nailed to their crosses.

We also know the Gospel writers recorded the words of Jesus. 7 times He spoke as He was hanging on the cross.

- His first words were asking for the forgiveness - most likely the forgiveness of the centurion and his soldiers. I'm pretty sure that was the first time that ever happened.
- Next, He spoke words of forgiveness and eternal life to one of the criminals.
- Jesus then spoke to His mother and the Apostle John - providing for John to care for Mary.
- He cried out as the Father forsook Him as He was isolated and separated from the Father as He bore the sins of humanity.
- The fifth and sixth thing Jesus said had to do with the drink He was offered. He refused the first drink which contained some sort of sedative to lessen the pain, and then in **John 19:28** Jesus said: "I thirst".
- The last thing He said was, "It is finished...Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit."

After these words, Jesus died.

We also read how in the middle of the day - the sun was darkened for about 3 hours (**Mark 15:33; Luke 23:44**).

**Turn to Matthew 27:** Matthew testifies to an earthquake at the time of Jesus' death (27:51), and graves in the area were opened and the dead were resurrected and they entered Jerusalem, seen by many witnesses (27:52-53).

**Matthew 27:54**

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!”

The ESV’s use of the word “awe” is not the best translation. The Greek term is *phobeo* - where we get our word phobia - and it has the idea of fear - paralyzing fear. A phobia is fear of something which is more overwhelming than other fears - a fear which is larger than other fears - a fear which takes over!

The centurion and “those who were with him” - the soldiers he was commanding - were eyewitnesses for the 6 hours Jesus hung on the cross. (Mark 15:25; Luke 23:44)

This centurion led one of the most cruel and sadistic execution squads in human history. He was no doubt hardened in his own soul as to the cries and hateful screaming he would have heard as he commanded the soldiers under his charge to not only kill those condemned to crucifixion, but he made sure they did so in the slowest and most tortuous way. After all, the point of crucifixion was not only to strike fear in the population if they ever considered taking up a sword against Rome, but it was designed to increase and lengthen the amount of suffering for the condemned. Historians tell us of crucifixions lasting up to 3 or 4 days!



Over the years, he had heard every insult and threat - every curse word - every degrading thing the most evil and perverted mind could think up.

He also would have heard every cry for mercy - every cry for a quick death - every cry of innocence.

These were hardened men - thick-skinned and dulled to the emotions and sensitivities of the moment.

What did they see which produced this fear? (*phobia*)

**Matthew** says they: “saw the earthquake and what took place”.

**Mark 15:39**

And when the centurion, who stood facing Him, saw that in this way He breathed His last...”

Maybe they were fearful of what would happen to them!

The Romans were polytheistic - they believed in many gods.

They believed the gods acted in human affairs and if angered, they would cause great destruction and pain.

After all, they just mocked, ridiculed, tortured and crucified an innocent man - and the darkened sun and the earthquake were signs that nature itself was convulsing - having a seizure related to this man who was unlike any other they had crucified!

What they had seen and heard - the pieces of evidence - they were able to put together and realize this was no ordinary man!

The sign on Jesus' cross read: “Jesus of Nazareth, The King of the Jews” (**John 19:19**).

The people yelling insults at Jesus - “You saved others...save Yourself!” (Luke 23:35)

The criminals they crucified were not known for saving others!

This was not a normal crucifixion.

That’s a sick thought... ‘normal crucifixion’.

In the first few weeks a soldier newly assigned to crucifixion duty - I’m sure he was unable to sleep. The human mind was not made to cope with such horrible, evil things done to other people.

But eventually - about 2 or 3 weeks into this new job, crucifying became ‘normal’. Evil and sadistic torture became...monotonous - just another day at the office.

But the crucifixion of Jesus was a great disruption to their monotonous work.

Something deep inside them was tugging at their heart - and their mind. This man was not like all the others - He was different - not only did the people’s reaction tip them off to this truth, but the convulsions of nature was undeniable evidence of something different...important...life-changing!

### **Look closely at Jesus**

All three passages tell us the centurion and his soldiers spent their day watching Jesus.

**Matthew 27:54**

When the centurion and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place...”

**Mark 15:39**

And when the centurion, who stood facing Him, saw that in this way He breathed His last...”

**Luke 23:47**

Now when the centurion saw what had taken place...”

Have you ever taken the time to take a close look at Jesus? Have you grabbed a Bible and simply read through the Gospels - slowly - to see the details?

Most people have questions about Jesus - have you allowed those questions to be your excuse to put off making a decision for Christ? So many people I've met over the years have questions - good questions - but they never look for the answers!

*Questions in your mind about Jesus is one of the ways the Holy Spirit begins to draw you to faith.*

But so many simply use their questions as a convenient obstacle in their way - an obstacle they convince themselves is too large to move.

The centurion and his men took into account all the things they saw that day - they considered the evidence. Won't you look closely at Jesus? Won't you consider the evidence that Jesus was God in the flesh - God incarnate - and He lived a sinless life and gave His life as a sacrifice for your sins?

Look closely at Jesus.

## **Decide based on the evidence**

Look at the centurion's response to what they saw - to the evidence.

**Matthew 27:54b**

"...they were filled with awe and said, "Truly this was the Son of God!"

**Mark 15:39b**

"...he said, "Truly this Man was the Son of God!"

They concluded - based on the events of the day which played out right in front of them - that Jesus was "the Son of God".

These were Romans - Gentile men who knew very little or nothing about Jewish religious beliefs. They were raised in a pagan culture with pagan religious beliefs. Jews believed in 1 God - Romans believed in many gods.

Jews believed in the moral law of God - Romans believed their gods encouraged certain immoral behaviors.

They were worlds apart in religious thought and belief. They were worlds apart in culture - in diet - in almost every area of life they had vast differences.

They must have had so many questions.

- What had Jesus done to get everyone so mad at Him?
- What are these miracles they are hearing about?
- Where are His followers?

- What did He mean when he told the criminal “Today, you will be with Me in Paradise.” (Luke 23:43)
- Why did He pray for our forgiveness?
- What is this rumor about resurrection?
- What did He teach about?

So many questions.

But their questions didn't prevent them from making a decision. They weren't paralyzed by what they didn't know.

Have you made a decision about Jesus?

Have you looked at the evidence?

Have you sought out the answers to your questions?

**Belief in Jesus is a *logical conclusion*.**

We see the response of the centurion...

**Luke 23:47b**

“...he praised God, saying, “Certainly this Man was innocent!”

In **Acts 3:14-15** Luke writes concerning the Jews: (Peter preaching in the Temple area)

“But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses.”

What a contrast...the Gentile, hardened and calloused Roman Centurion sees Jesus and comes to ***the logical conclusion*** that He was the innocent Son of God and therefore praises Jesus - while the Jews did the opposite.

*“Release the murderer...crucify the Messiah!”*

The centurion's statement not only testifies to the sinless life of Jesus, but it also points out that Jesus' offer of salvation is not only for the Jews - it's for all people. It doesn't matter who you are...what you've done...how many sins are piled up in your past.

Jesus has given His life for you - won't you look at the evidence and believe in Him as your Savior? ***It is a logical conclusion*** when you examine the evidence.

What does it mean when Luke says the centurion "praised God"? Well, Luke connects it directly to his affirmation of Jesus' innocence. The innocence of Jesus is the content of his praise.

I believe it's meant to be an example to us - what evidence to look for.

Look to Jesus' life.

Look to Jesus' sinless life.

John said: "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:36)

The Lamb of God is a reference to the Passover Lamb - a spotless lamb - nothing wrong with it - which was sacrificed in the place of the people.

Jesus was spotless - no sin - completely righteous - "innocent" - and He was sacrificed in our place. **Isaiah 53:5-6** "But He was wounded for our transgressions; He was crushed for our iniquities; upon Him was the chastisement that brought us

peace, and with His stripes we are healed...and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.”

The innocence of Jesus - His sinless life - is a contrast to every other person in history.

Even Pilate declared multiple times that Jesus was innocent.

His innocence draws us to Him - and we praise Him for His grace - for His love.

**Romans 5:8**

“...but God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

But this is Easter - and we look not only to the cross - but thank goodness Sunday comes after Friday - and we look to the empty tomb of Sunday morning!

The Apostle Paul says in **1 Cor. 15:**

“...of first importance...that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures,

**4** that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures,

**5**and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.

**6** Then He appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive...”

Jesus is not dead...He is risen!

The centurion was right - “Truly this Man was the Son of God!”

Easter means the promise of Jesus that He gives us new life - eternal life - is true. You can trust His promises!

When He talked to Nicodemus about “being born again” - “born of the Spirit” (John 3), and when He talked with the Samaritan woman about “living water” (John 4), He was speaking of something real - something tangible.

### **Apply it...**

What is your verdict?

- Do you trust the evidence presented about Jesus?
- Do you trust the eyewitness testimony of the Roman Centurion?
- Have you looked closely at Jesus?
- Have you made a decision and believed in Jesus as your Savior?
- I pray you will do as the centurion did - examine the evidence for Jesus - and come to the logical conclusion that Jesus is the Christ - the Son of God - and salvation can be found in Him and Him alone.

**A**dmit your sins

**B**elieve in Jesus as your Savior - the only Savior

**C**ommit each day to Christ

Close in prayer - A - B - C