

The Centurion (or Roman Officer) had the job of overseeing the crucifixion of Christ. Centurions were professional career soldiers who generally commanded a platoon of 100 to several hundred soldiers. However, crucifixion duty probably only involved four or five soldiers. They were trained to be cold and efficient with no emotional stake in the crucifixions. So, it wouldn't matter to them if they were crucifying a criminal or in this case the Son of God. They were there to carry out orders and would be totally unaffected by the blood and broken bones and the goriness associated with executions. But something changed for the Centurion overseeing Jesus' crucifixion.

⁴⁵ At noon, darkness fell across the whole land until three o'clock. ⁴⁶ At about three o'clock, Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" which means "My God, My God, why have you abandoned me?" ⁴⁷ Some of the bystanders misunderstood and thought He was calling out for the prophet Elijah. ⁴⁸ One of them ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, holding it up on a reed stick so he could drink. ⁴⁹ But the rest said, "Wait! Let's see whether Elijah comes to save Him." ⁵⁰ Then Jesus shouted out again, and He released His Spirit. ⁵¹ At that moment the curtain in the sanctuary of the Temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, rocks split apart, ⁵² and tombs opened. The bodies of many godly men and women who had died were raised from the dead. ⁵³ They left the cemetery after Jesus' resurrection, went into the holy city of Jerusalem, and appeared to many people. ⁵⁴ The Roman Officer and the other soldiers at the crucifixion were terrified by the earthquake and all that had happened. They said, "This man truly was the Son of God!"

-Matthew 27:45-54

APPLICATION

Somewhere along the way, this hardened, emotionless, cold, professional soldier was moved by Jesus. Of all the executions he'd overseen, he had never witnessed this depth of anguish as Jesus was physically mangled but also spiritually separated from God. It may have been the love and care He exhibited for His mother even in His state. He may have been more scared than he had ever experienced with all the signs that accompanied Jesus' death – the veil and temple, the darkness in the middle of the day, the earthquake, the tombs being opened. Or maybe it was the power in the prayers Jesus prayed from the cross. Perhaps it was all of the above. This was not the normal crucifixion. Having witnessed all of that, he believed and proclaimed Jesus the Son of God.

Return to the cross, be moved by Jesus, and believe. If the heart of someone the likes of the Centurion can be melted by the Messiah, what's our excuse? Maybe we've grown too comfortable with the cross. This was not the average crucifixion.

DISCUSSION/CONTEMPLATION

- Try to recall when the cross of Christ first moved you.

- If you can't recall, meditate on it and let it move you now.

- Set up an altar in your heart that you can return to daily.

D6-CUSSION

Pray that the cross of Christ will always be meaningful to you and that as it impacts you, it impacts others around you.

- What stands out to you the most?
- What questions do you have?
- What is an application for your life?

PRAYERS & PRAISE