

Finding Your Story in HIStory
Making God's Story Your Story
Matthew 27:45-54

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Text Introduction: Beginning tonight our choir and orchestra along with a drama cast will begin 3 nights of sharing a musical play entitled *The Choice*. *The Choice* is what is called historical fiction. *The Choice* tells the story of the arrest, crucifixion, and resurrection from the perspective of the Roman centurion who oversees the crucifixion. *The Choice* is fictional in that for dramatic purposes more is developed about the life of the centurion than the text of Scripture tells us. *The Choice* is historical in that a Roman centurion overseeing the crucifixion of Jesus did indeed announce faith in Christ upon seeing Jesus' death. I want to share that story today as we continue our journey to see the working out of God's story in history.

For those of you who have not been with us in recent weeks, we have outlined history leading up to the coming of Jesus. We have discovered about that history that God throughout history had prepared humanity for the coming of Christ. We will want to see today that God's story demands a choice to follow Christ.

Text: ⁴⁵ From noon until three in the afternoon darkness came over the whole land. ⁴⁶ About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "*Elí, Elí, lemá sabachtháni?*" that is, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"

⁴⁷ When some of those standing there heard this, they said, "He's calling for Elijah!"

⁴⁸ Immediately one of them ran and got a sponge, filled it with sour wine, fixed it on a reed, and offered Him a drink. ⁴⁹ But the rest said, "Let's see if Elijah comes to save Him!"

⁵⁰ Jesus shouted again with a loud voice and gave up His spirit. ⁵¹ Suddenly, the curtain of the sanctuary was split in two from top to bottom; the earth quaked and the rocks were split. ⁵² The tombs were also opened and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised. ⁵³ And they came out of the tombs after His resurrection, entered the holy city, and appeared to many.

⁵⁴ When the centurion and those with him, who were guarding Jesus, saw the earthquake and the things that had happened, they were terrified and said, "This man really was God's Son!"

Introduction: Our text today tells us that there were five supernatural miracles that occurred during the hours of Jesus' crucifixion—the darkness, the torn veil, the earthquake, and the resurrection of the saints, and the response of the centurion. I think there is widespread agreement that the first four happenings are miracles. Some may not think the response of the centurion and other soldiers is supernatural. However, any time someone has the faith to see Jesus for who He really is, God is at work!

This would not be the last time that someone would come face to face with the power of Christ and the cross and respond in faith. The confession of the soldiers has happened over and over again throughout

history. It happened to Dan Leach who lived just outside of Houston. On January 19, 2004, Dan Leach pulled off the perfect crime. By getting ideas from a popular television crime show, he murdered his girlfriend, but made it appear like a suicide. The authorities ruled the death of the girl a suicide. But on March 7, 2004, Dan Leach walked into the local Sheriff's Department and confessed to the murder giving very specific details that detectives said only the murderer would have known. What made Dan confess? Earlier that day, he went alone to a showing of the movie, *The Passion of the Christ*. After seeing what he called the death of an innocent man, he realized that he could not truly repent of his sin unless he turned himself in for the murder.

Again, anytime a person turns from sin to the Savior, that is a miracle. I want you to see with me several things about this miracle.

The Characters

"the centurion and those with him"

The first thing that we notice in verse 54 are the characters. As the title suggests, a centurion was commander over one hundred soldiers. He was the leader. "Those with him" suggests regular soldiers. The important thing to understand is that these soldiers were just doing a job. They had presided over countless other crucifixions. In that respect, the crucifixion of Jesus was no different than any other crucifixion. The idea is that they had no emotional attachment whatsoever to what was going on that day. That's the beginning thing that makes this confession so amazing. They are not looking to follow Jesus. They haven't investigated Jesus' works or His words. But, when confronted with what they saw that day, they had no other choice but to exclaim, "Truly this was the son of God."

The Confession

"Truly this was the son of God"

In the context of Matthew's Gospel, we should consider this confession a statement of faith. Why?

- Matthew 14:33

Then those in the boat worshiped Him and said, "Truly You are the Son of God!"

Two things are noteworthy in this text. First, this is the confession of the disciples who had just witnessed Jesus walking on the water. The other very important aspect of this text is the link between the confession and worship.

- Matthew 16:16

¹⁶ *Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God!"*

This is an important confession because Peter recognized him as the Christ in comparison to what others were saying about Jesus.

But, then, there is more as it relates to the centurion. Luke records it this way in his Gospel.

- Luke 23:47

⁴⁷ *When the centurion saw what happened, he began to glorify God, saying, "This man really was righteous!"*

There is that connection again between the confession and praise.

The Context of the Confession

Next, it is important that we understand the context of the confession. Let's remind ourselves of a few things—some things that we have talked about and some things in addition that surround this scene.

The centurion and other soldiers made this confession in light of the ...

- **The Works of God**—The darkness, the torn veil, the earthquake, and the resurrected bodies. Again, all of this screams out the glory of God.
- **The Way that Jesus died**—The confession was made in the context of witnessing the way that Jesus died. You can learn a lot about a person in the way that he or she dies.
- **The Words of Jesus**—Remember that Jesus spoke 7 phrases from the cross. We don't have time to deal with all of them now, but I mention two that must have stood out to the soldiers. First, Jesus said specifically to the soldiers, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do." Second, Jesus said to one of the criminals, "Assuredly, I say unto you, today you will be with Me in Paradise." Certainly in the midst of the works of God and the way the He died, the soldiers must have been amazed at the "words of Jesus."

The Conclusions from the Confession

Most of all, we need to see some conclusions from this confession.

1. God desires that all would be saved.
 - There is no past so problematic that God will not pursue.
 - There is no heart so hard that God cannot soften.
 - There is no sin so sinful that God cannot forgive.

2. God demands a decision.

One thing we learn from the response of the soldier is that the cross of Christ demands a response. You must decide.

I close with two stories to guide our decision.

Joni Erickson Tada tells the story about her wedding day. For those of you not familiar with the name, Joni is paralyzed and therefore was coming down the aisle on her wedding day in a wheelchair. Two things happened to her that day. First, she got her dress caught in the wheel getting grease on her dress. Second she got her bouquet stuck in the wheel smashing her bouquet. Joni says she forgot about herself—the grease and the bouquet—when she saw her husband, Ken. Joni then says that this is the

way it is with Jesus. We all come with grease on our clothes and smashed bouquets, so we must look to Him—Jesus!

So, we must look to Jesus just as the soldiers did that day. Then, we must make the confession that the soldiers did. The story comes from the musician Bach. In his oratorio, *St. Matthew's Passion*, he designed the finale to make a very specific point. The finale reflects this confession from the centurion. Here's what Bach did. He felt that it wasn't enough to reflect this confession only as the confession of the centurion. He knew that every person must be willing to make this their confession. So, instead of the line being a solo, the entire choir sings this part. In addition, in the musical score accompanying this phrase, Bach musically wrote in his name for the bass line. This was Bach's way of saying, "I believe that Jesus is the son of God." Can you put your name on this line? You must! For, God desires that all would be saved. God demands your decision today.