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# Responding to the Divine Evidence

*"Now the centurion, and those who were with him keeping guard over Jesus, when they saw the earthquake and the things that were happening, became very frightened and said, 'Truly this was the Son of God!'" (Matthew 27:54).*

*"When the centurion, who was standing right in front of Him, saw the way He breathed His last, he said, 'Truly this man was the Son of God!'" (Mark 15:39).*

*"Now when the centurion saw what had happened, he began praising God, saying, 'Certainly this man was innocent'" (Luke 23:47).*

Three of the Gospel writers mentioned the centurion who stood at the foot of the cross and declared his faith in Jesus. Matthew said that when the centurion and "those who were with him" saw the things that were happening, they became frightened and made some acknowledgment concerning who Jesus was, with the centurion making the most dominant and forthright statement about Him. Mark said that the centurion, being especially impressed with the way Jesus had died, publicly asserted, "Truly this man was the Son of God!" Luke also said that the centurion, when he was persuaded by the deliberate, calm way that Jesus breathed His last, "began praising God" and said, "Certainly this man was innocent."

Jesus has always put our hearts to the test, but He especially does it with the character of His death. He is "the way, and the truth, and the life . . ." (John 14:6), but we must decide what we will do with Him. The decision we make reveals the kind of hearts we have.

Four different centurions are mentioned in the New Testament, and each is portrayed in a commendable light. First, there was the centurion of whom the Jews said, "For he loves our nation and it was he who built us our synagogue" (Luke 7:5). It was about his sincere faith that Jesus said, "I say to you, not even in Israel have I found such great faith" (Luke 7:9). Second, we see a highly respected centurion, a leader of the Italian band, in Acts 10. He was Cornelius, "a devout man and one who feared God with all his household . . ." (Acts 10:2). He became the first Gentile convert to Christ. Third,

as Paul was taken to Rome, he was assigned to Julius, a centurion of the Augustus band. Luke said that he "treated Paul with consideration and allowed him to go to his friends and receive care" (Acts 27:3). Later in the journey, Luke also said that he intervened and saved Paul's life (Acts 27:42, 43). The fourth centurion is the one who at the end of the crucifixion stepped to the foot of the cross and declared who he had come to believe Jesus was (Matthew 27:54; Mark 15:39; Luke 23:47).

A second-century writer, Polybius, said that as a rule the best men in the army were appointed to the rank of centurion. With its brief depictions of these four centurions, the New Testament bears out his testimony.

Think of what this centurion at the cross had seen and heard. If he was given all aspects of this crucifixion as his commission, he would have been in charge of Jesus from the time of His trial before Pilate on down to and through the crucifixion itself. He would have seen not only the events of the crucifixion, but also all the events that had led up to it. He would have witnessed the scourging. He would have been present for the mockery of Jesus' kingship. He would have seen the derision conveyed by the crown of thorns being thrust upon his brow, the purple robe being draped around Him, and the reed that imitated a scepter being placed in His hands. He would have seen Him being spit upon in the worst type of mockery. In addition to all of this, he would have been in charge of the squad of soldiers who conducted the procession down the way of sorrows and on to

Calvary. He would have been on hand when Simon was chosen to carry His cross. He would have observed from only a few feet away how majestically Jesus endured all of this shame, ridicule, and mockery.

Though it is hard to imagine, he would have stood next to Jesus when He was nailed to the cross; perhaps he would have assisted in lifting the cross and positioning it to stand upright; and he would have spent six hours near the cross keeping watch over this grotesque scene. When darkness came over the land at noon, he would have seen and felt it and shuddered in its blackness; however, while others left the scene and went home, he would have stayed near the cross guarding the victims. At the last, he would have felt the rumble of the earth beneath his feet as “the earth shook and the rocks were split” (Matthew 27:51).

Above all this, and far more telling and transcendent, he would have watched Jesus as He gave His life for the world. He would have heard every word that He uttered from the cross; he would have seen His disposition and demeanor, and he would have witnessed close up how the Son of God chose to breathe His last.

Perhaps only a few others in the history of the world have had the privilege that this centurion had. All the evidence that God gave through His death on the cross to engender faith was paraded before his eyes! What would he do with this mountain of evidence? Would he go back to other duties only wondering about it? Luke said that some did just that: “And all the crowds who came together for this spectacle, when they observed what had happened, began to return, beating their breasts” (Luke 23:48). What would this centurion do with what he had seen and heard?

*He was sincere enough to take due notice of the evidence.* This centurion was too honest to let this barrage of evidence elude him. He must have said, “These things I must observe and think about. They are too unusual for me not to consider.” He was somewhat like Moses when he saw the burning bush and said to himself, “I must turn aside now and see . . . why the bush is not burned up” (Exodus 3:3).

Apparently, numerous others did not take notice of what had been before their eyes. They

saw, but they did not see. Perhaps, it could be said of them that they were “always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” (2 Timothy 3:7). This was not the case, however, with this centurion.

*He was honest enough to accept the evidence.* This centurion was unable to just study the evidence; he had to accept it. It was too complete and overwhelming for him to ignore. Luke wrote, “Now when the centurion saw what had happened, he began praising God, saying, ‘Certainly this man was innocent’” (Luke 23:47).

He allowed the evidence to bring him to three conclusions. First, he let it show him that Jesus “was innocent.” This fact, in light of the circumstance, was inevitable. If Jesus was not innocent, He was not the Son of God; if He was not the Son of God, He could not have been our Savior. God has always aimed His evidence toward convincing every sincere heart that Jesus was the innocent Lamb who was slain for the sin of the world.

Second, the centurion allowed the evidence to lead him into praising God. He began and continued, the Greek text says, praising God. The end result of faith is always the act of praising God. We have not finished rearing our children until they are praising God; and we have not truly accepted the evidence concerning Jesus until we are praising God.

Third, he permitted the evidence to motivate him to say in the hearing of others that Jesus was not only innocent, but also that He “was the Son of God” (Mark 15:39).

*He was humble enough to publicly acknowledge the evidence.* Yes, this man believed. Admittedly, this issued has been often debated. It is argued, did he just conclude that Jesus was someone special or did he conclude that He was actually the Son of God? Which was it?

Let us remember that the trial of Jesus, which the centurion must have attended and heard, was about Jesus’ claim that He was the Son of God. One of the final arguments that the Jews made was, “He claimed to be Deity!” They said to Pilate, “We have a law, and by that law He ought to die because He made Himself out to be the Son of God” (John 19:7). Their argument frightened Pilate, and he took Him into the Praetorium and questioned Him further about it. The

centurion surely knew about these accusations that were made at the trial. As he studied the evidence of His conduct and the supernatural phenomena that surrounded His death, he became convinced that Jesus was who He said He was. To get at the truth, we must carefully weigh the context of each passage that tells of his declaration about Jesus. When we do so, we are driven to the conclusion that the centurion had come to believe that Jesus was the Son of God before he made his declaration.

This centurion will forever stand in the Scriptures as an illustration of what a good heart does when it is confronted with the divine testimony of who Jesus is. This type of heart will carefully study the evidence, honestly accept it

as being true, and will henceforth acknowledge it as the major truth of life.

The major truth, the bottom-line truth, about each of us is this: "What have I done with the truest truth about life, the truth that Jesus is the Son of God?"

Eddie Cloer



*“. . . ‘Behold, the sower went out to sow; and as he sowed, some seeds . . . fell on the good soil and yielded a crop, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty. He who has ears, let him hear’”  
(Matthew 13:3–9).*