

Mark 15:39

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And when the centurion, which stood over against him, saw that he so cried out, and gave up the ghost, he said, Truly this man was the Son of God.

Analysis

This verse records the profound testimony of a Roman centurion who supervised Jesus' crucifixion. The phrase "when the centurion, which stood over against him, saw" emphasizes eyewitness testimony—this wasn't hearsay but direct observation. "That he so cried out, and gave up the ghost" refers to Jesus' final cry and death. What the centurion witnessed convinced him of Jesus' identity. His confession "Truly this man was the Son of God" (Ἀληθῶς οὗτος ὁ ἄνθρωπος υἱὸς θεοῦ ἦν, Alēthōs houtos ho anthrōpos huios theou ēn) is theologically stunning. This Gentile soldier, having overseen countless crucifixions, recognized something unique about Jesus' death. The word "truly" (alēthōs) indicates firm conviction, not speculation. "Son of God" may have meant different things to a Roman versus a Jew—Romans used this title for emperors and heroes—but Mark intends readers to understand it in its fullest sense: Jesus is truly God's divine Son. The irony is striking: Jewish religious leaders rejected Jesus as blasphemer; Roman authorities crucified Him as insurrectionist; yet a pagan centurion confesses what Israel's leaders denied. This fulfills Mark's opening verse (1:1) and anticipates the gospel's spread to Gentiles. The centurion's confession demonstrates that the cross, intended as shame and defeat, actually reveals Jesus' true identity and accomplishes redemption.

Historical Context

Roman centurions commanded units of approximately 80-100 soldiers and were career military professionals. This centurion had likely supervised numerous crucifixions and witnessed many deaths. What distinguished Jesus' death? Possibilities include: Jesus' prayer for His executioners (Luke 23:34), His care for His mother (John 19:26-27), the supernatural darkness (Mark 15:33), His cry of dereliction (v. 34), His voluntary yielding of His spirit ("gave up the ghost" suggests Jesus actively dismissed His spirit rather than passively dying), and the earthquake and temple veil tearing (Matthew 27:51-54). The centurion's confession occurs at a pivotal moment in Mark's narrative—immediately after Jesus' death, before the resurrection. Mark begins with the declaration "Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (1:1) and ends (before the resurrection) with a Gentile's confession of the same truth. This inclusion of a Roman soldier's testimony was significant for Mark's audience—likely Gentile Christians in Rome. It demonstrated that faith in Jesus transcends ethnic and religious boundaries. The early church saw this as prophetic—the Jews who should have recognized their Messiah rejected Him, while Gentiles who had no covenant relationship embraced Him (Romans 11:11-24). Church history records that tradition identified this centurion as Longinus, though this cannot be verified.

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. What specifically about Jesus' death convinced the centurion of His divine identity, and what does this teach about how the cross reveals Christ's glory?

2. How does the irony of a Gentile soldier confessing Jesus as God's Son while Jewish leaders rejected Him illustrate the gospel's reversal of human expectations?
3. In what ways does the centurion's confession demonstrate that authentic faith can arise from unexpected sources?
4. What does this verse teach about the cross as both apparent defeat and actual victory, shame and glory?
5. How should the centurion's immediate confession after witnessing Jesus' death challenge delayed or reluctant responses to the gospel today?

Interlinear Text

Ἰδὼν	δὲ	ὃ	κεντυρίων	ὃ	παρεστηκὼς	ἔξ
saw	And	which	when the centurion	which	stood	over
G1492	G1161	G3588	G2760	G3588	G3936	G1537
ἐναντίας	αὐτοῦ	ὅτι	οὕτως	κράξας	ἔξέπνευσεν	εἶπεν
against	him	that	he so	cried out	and gave up the ghost	he said
G1727	G846	G3754	G3779	G2896	G1606	G2036
Ἀληθῶς	ὃ	ἄνθρωπος	οὗτος	υἱὸς	ἦν	θεοῦ
Truly	which	man	this	the Son	was	of God
G230	G3588	G444	G3778	G5207	G2258	G2316

Additional Cross-References

Matthew 27:54 (References God): Now when the centurion, and they that were with him, watching Jesus, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God.

Matthew 27:43 (References God): He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God.

Acts 10:1 (Parallel theme): There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band,

