

Matthew 27:54

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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.

Analysis

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. The Roman centurion supervising the crucifixion witnessed supernatural events and declared faith. 'Saw the earthquake, and those things that were done' (ἰδόντες τὸν σεισμὸν καὶ τὰ γενόμενα/identes ton seismon kai ta genomena)—darkness, earthquake, opened tombs, the manner of Jesus's death (His voluntary yielding of spirit, His loud cry despite physical weakness).

'They feared greatly' (έφοβήθησαν σφόδρα/ephobēthēsan sphodra)—intense fear, awe before divine power. This wasn't mere superstition but recognition of God's presence. 'Truly this was the Son of God' (Ἀληθῶς θεοῦ νιὸς ἦν οὗτος/Alēthōs theou hyios ēn houtos)—remarkable confession from a pagan soldier.

Whether this was saving faith or mere acknowledgment is debated. Early tradition (some church fathers) held the centurion (named Longinus in tradition) became a Christian. At minimum, it shows God's power to open even hardened hearts—a Roman soldier trained to kill, who had crucified many, saw in Jesus's death something transcendent and confessed His divine sonship.

Historical Context

Centurions were professional soldiers, commanding 80-100 men, tough and experienced. This man had likely supervised numerous crucifixions. Yet Jesus's death was unique—the darkness, earthquake, His bearing, His words ('Father, forgive them,' 'It is finished'). These signs convinced even a pagan soldier of Christ's deity.

This fulfills Jesus's words: 'I, if I be lifted up... will draw all men unto me' (John 12:32). The cross that appeared as weakness became the magnet drawing even Gentile soldiers to faith.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. How does a pagan Roman centurion confessing Jesus as 'Son of God' demonstrate the gospel's power to save even the most unlikely people?
2. What specific evidences convinced the centurion—how can we point others to similar evidence of Christ's deity and saving work?
3. What does it mean that supernatural signs (earthquake, darkness) accompanied the cross—how do these validate Christ's atoning death?

Interlinear Text

Ο δὲ ἐκατόνταρχος καὶ οἱ μετ' αὐτοῦ
G3588 Now when the centurion and G3588 they that were with him
G1161 G1543 G2532 G3326 G846

τηροῦντες τὸν Ἰησοῦν ἰδόντες τὸν σεισμὸν καὶ τὰ
watching G3588 Jesus saw G3588 the earthquake and G3588
G5083 G2424 G1492 G4578 G2532

γενόμενα ἐφοβήθησαν σφόδρα λέγοντες ἀληθῶς
those things that were done they feared greatly saying Truly
G1096 G5399 G4970 G3004 G230

θεοῦ υἱὸς ἦν οὗτος
of God the Son was this
G2316 G5207 G2258 G3778

Additional Cross-References

Mark 15:39 (References God): 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.

Matthew 27:36 (Parallel theme): And sitting down they watched him there;

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 27:1 (Parallel theme): And when it was determined that we should sail into Italy, they delivered Paul and certain other prisoners unto one named Julius, a centurion of Augustus' band.

Acts 21:32 (Parallel theme): Who immediately took soldiers and centurions, and ran down unto them: and when they saw the chief captain and the soldiers, they left beating of Paul.

Acts 23:23 (Parallel theme): And he called unto him two centurions, saying, Make ready two hundred soldiers to go to Caesarea, and horsemen threescore and ten, and spearmen two hundred, at the third hour of the night;

Acts 27:43 (Parallel theme): But the centurion, willing to save Paul, kept them from their purpose; and commanded that they which could swim should cast themselves first into the sea, and get to land:

Matthew 4:3 (References God): And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.

Matthew 8:5 (References Jesus): And when Jesus was entered into Capernaum, there came unto him a centurion, beseeching him,

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