

Empire Church of the Brethren

Sunday Service Sermons

13 April 2025

When Christ is Confessed

Text: "Now when the centurion, and those 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." *Matt. 27:54*

Ernest Gordon, former dean of the chapel at Princeton University, wrote in his book coauthored with Peter Funk, *A guidebook for New Christians*, that for six years he saw active service as a soldier in the Highland Regiment.

That service included tragic battles, wounds, and imprisonment.

He became accustomed to fear, hate, brutality, torture, and despair.

He lost his fear of pain and death and of what other men could do to him.

He was hardened by the laws of nations and the experience of survival.

Death and hell could not scare him.

What changed his life was the "love profound" he saw in the lives of converted men.

They showed him the way to Jesus and to the activity of the father.

Gordon was not the first hardened soldier affected by "love profound" as seen in the cross of Jesus Christ.

Probably the first was the centurion who presided over the death of Jesus.

Although callused by death, he was sensitive to the difference between Jesus and other men he had seen die.

This difference caused him to confess, "Truly this was the Son of God."

How much the centurion knew about Jesus previously we don't know.

How much of the trial he attended and the impressions he had from the trial we don't know.

What we do know is his confession of Christ as the Son of God.

At the cross the centurion who presided over the death of Jesus confessed The Christ.

Our confession of Christ is much the same.

And it comes at the cross just as it did for the centurion.

In the confession of Christ is the observation of events.

This Roman leader would be a keen observer of events.

He could not have reached such a place of leadership without the ability to observe the events taking place around him.

As the centurion in charge of the crucifixion detail, he would have been aware of at least the things that happened on the way to the cross and at the cross.

These events must have made a profound impression on him.

The behavior of Jesus at the trial also would have impressed him.

Jesus stood at the trial with regal bearing.

One gets the impression that Pilate was on trial before Jesus rather than Jesus before Pilate.

The acceptance of the sentence and the cross by Jesus was impressive.

Whereas many others had likely protested, cursed, and sought to escape the sentence, Jesus never said a mumbling word.

Likewise, Jesus' actions on the way to Golgotha were impressive.

There was no bitterness, no protestation of innocence, no shrieking or crying out.

Instead, he comforted others along the way.

The words from the cross that we have collected and called the "seven last words of Christ" must have had some impact on the observers.

And one certainly cannot overlook the supernatural occurrences that took place at the time of the

crucifixion.

And a keen observer of events, the Roman centurion would have been impressed at the crucifixion of Jesus.

Any sensitive person becomes aware of these same events.

As we transport ourselves from the time of the crucifixion to the present, we perceive that any sensitive person becomes aware of these same events.

We know something out of the ordinary was happening as Jesus was crucified.

This is the application of Jesus' statement in *John 12:32*: "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me."

As he was lifted up from the earth in crucifixion, he drew people to himself in confession and faith.

One of those drawn to him was the centurion in charge of the execution squad that killed him.

Likewise, sensitive people of all time have been drawn to him by his death.

In the confession of Christ there is the reversal of opinion.

An initial opinion.

Whatever opinion the centurion originally had of Jesus, it was not that he was the Son of God.

We cannot, of course, know his initial opinion of Jesus, but we can surmise what it was.

And from what we know of Roman military officers, we can imagine that he did not initially consider Jesus to be the Son of God.

Nevertheless he had a complete reversal of opinion.

And it can happen to any person.

How does one view Jesus?

Some look at Jesus as a great teacher.

A teacher he was.

"No one ever taught like this man" was a current opinion of Jesus.

He was called "Teacher" more than any other title in the Gospels.

Jesus was a great Teacher.

But he was more than that.

Others would look on Jesus as an inspired and inspiring religious leader.

And that he was also.

He inspired others to follow him and to rise above themselves.

He was obviously inspired by God in his teaching and his activities.

He was an inspired religious leader.

But he was more.

Still others would see Jesus as a significant historical figure.

When one looks at the historical figures of the ages, Jesus stands out among them.

To grant his historicity and to acknowledge his place in history is one thing, but it is not to accept him as Savior.

He was a significant historical figure.

But he was more.

He was the Christ, the Son of God.

That is what the centurion confessed when he witnessed the crucifixion of Jesus.

A reversed opinion.

It is not until a person makes that reversal of opinion and begins to look on Jesus as the Son of God and his or her personal Savior that salvation occurs.

Until you are ready to confess him as the Son of God, he is not your Savior.

In the confession of Christ there is the realization of redemption.

An objective element in the atonement: Jesus died to redeem humankind from their sins.

The atonement was real.

The crucifixion really happened.

When we look at all the events at the cross, we realize that they actually happened.

The crucifixion was not a charade or a staged event.

Objectively, Jesus died on the cross.

And his death on the cross was for the redemption of humankind from sin.

A subjective element in the atonement: Jesus died to redeem humankind from their sins.

The subjective element is the confession that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, and the acceptance of him as one's own personal Savior.

This is how redemption is realized.

There is no way that one can view the death of Christ for humankind and come away unaffected.

People see this act of suffering love, and it makes them ashamed of their sins.

It awakens their gratitude and releases within them new springs of love that make them new creatures reconciled to God.

Jesus' words "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me" are the theological basis of many of our great hymns, for example, Isaac Watts's "When I survey the Wondrous Cross".

When I survey the wondrous cross, on which the Prince of glory died, my richest gain I count but loss, and pour contempt on all my pride.

No theology is big enough to contain the whole truth about the cross of Jesus Christ.

The objective fact is that each person must confess him as the Christ and receive him as their personal Savior.

When Christ is confessed, salvation is received and sin is forgiven.

We must confess Christ to receive the forgiveness of our sins.