



In the Shadow of the Cross Confession

Matthew 27: 45-54

just another way to God, but the way to God. We are agreeing with Jesus who said I am the way, the Truth and the Life and no one comes to Father except by Me. My friends, the cross loses its significance and meaning if there was another way. If there is another way to God outside Jesus, then the death of Jesus becomes nonsense and foolishness. The confession of Son of God leads us to three places. It leads us to worship. If Jesus is God's Son, then the only response that makes any sense is worship. It leads us to reverence. That is we give attention to His life and words. If this is the Son of God, then His words and instruction must become important for us to hear and understand. It leads us to obedience. If Jesus is the Son of God, then our response must be obedience.

In the shadow of the cross today, let us make a confession that Jesus is the Son of God.

Let us confess our need of forgiveness and our inclusion in God's grace. In the shadow of the cross we catch a glimpse of the seriousness of our sin. When we think of Jesus who is sinless dying for our sin, we realize that the sin we rationalize, accept, and let so easily entangle us is that which separates us from a loving and forgiving God. In our confession of sin, in the shadow of the cross, we also confess our inclusion. In the death of Jesus we are reminded that we are all included in God's grace. Even this Centurion is included. You are included. There is nothing that we can do that separates us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. Jesus died once and for all to cancel our sin. In the shadow of the cross today we confess yes, we have sinned and yes, we are included in God's forgiveness.

The final confession we need to make is our utter dependence on Jesus. In Jesus' death we again see that He alone is sufficient for our salvation and for our future. Jesus died, but Jesus rose again. The resurrections mentioned here in Matthew remind us that our hope for eternity is found in no one else, but Jesus. Only Jesus

has overcome death and the grave. Our hope for eternity is totally dependent on Jesus.

My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness. I dare not trust the sweetest strain, but wholly lean on Jesus name. On Christ the solid rock I stand all other ground is sinking sand, all other ground is sinking sand.

In the shadow of the cross we must confess that we are dependent on Jesus and Jesus alone.

The online site "Death Clock" bills itself as the Internet's friendly reminder of the brevity of life. You can go there and input your information and it will give you a death date. You can also make it a screensaver so you can live and laugh and love in the face of death.

I don't know about you, but I don't need the death clock. I just need the cross of Jesus. In the face of His death, I am reminded that He is the Son of God. God has included me in his forgiveness and grace. In Jesus' death and resurrection, I have the hope of my own resurrection through the power of God. It is these confessions that allow me to live, laugh and love in the face of death.

Matthew wants us to know that the cross of Jesus changed everything, included everyone and makes all the difference in the world. In the shadow of the cross will you make your confession? Will you confess today, Jesus you are the Son of God worthy of my worship, my attention and my obedience? Will you confess your sins and enter into God's forgiveness? Will you confess your dependence upon Jesus for this life and for the life to come?

The shadow of the cross leads us to confession. ▲



In the movie Meet Joe Black, Brad Pitt plays death personified. Taking the body of a young man who was struck by a car in an accident, Joe Black becomes a constant companion of a wealthy media tycoon played by Anthony Hopkins. In the movie, death wants to experience life and chooses to learn life from a successful man. The successful man lives for days with death in his presence. The movie has many moments that cause you to ponder, but the one throughout the movie that causes you to question is what is it like to live with death not at your door, but literally in your house and at your side at all time? What occurs when death clarifies life for this CEO Tycoon? All of a sudden making more money is not as important as leaving a legacy. Family, which had been important, becomes priority. Reflection on life becomes a daily practice. Work, family, and even small things like peanut butter become things to be noticed.

There is something about death that tells us about life. As a pastor, I have been honored in many situations to be in the room as families journeyed with their loved ones to the final place. I have watched many a person cross over into that life eternal and what is left behind is a incredible stillness and silence. For those who love the Lord it is a holy moment and sacred moment.

Today, as we make our way to the cross, we begin with the end in mind. We take a moment to consider the death of Jesus to reflect on the life of Jesus. We stand there in the shadow of the cross

considering His life and realize we are in that moment standing in the most holy and sacred moment the world has ever known, even if at the time it was missed by most. However, everyone did not miss it.

In Matthew 27 we find the final moments of Jesus' life on this earth prior to the resurrection. In this chapter we get a full view of what it means when John wrote the word became flesh. Yes, the word, God, became flesh and that is nowhere more apparent than on the cross. On the cross the flesh, the humanity of Jesus, is in full view. The suffering, the pain and the struggle is there for all to see and for us to read and imagine.

There are many there that day in the shadow of the cross. There are those who have come out of love and devotion. We know that the women who had been traveling with Jesus and His disciples have gathered. These include Jesus' mother, Mary, who has traveled this whole journey with her son. There is John, the only disciple we know who gathered at the foot of the cross that day. What had been spoken had come true. They had struck the shepherd and the sheep had scattered.

There are others there that day in the shadow of the cross of Jesus. There were bystanders and there were those who were there to make sure Jesus' life is finally coming to an end. And then there were also those there who never knew that this day would change their lives.

At the cross of Jesus we are told there was a centurion. A Roman soldier who is doing his job is also at Golgotha that day.

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He is a man who is in charge. He is a man who is just doing his job. You wonder if he can even count and remember how many crucifixions he has attended and participated in. Don't you know if this was part of his job that he had seen and heard it all? How many hours of cursing had he endured at a crucifixion? I am sure he had been the target of the cursing of those who were being crucified. How many moments had he heard regrets and confessions? How many hours of begging for mercy had he had to tune out of his mind as he tried to do what he was charged to do?

Can you imagine what this man has seen and heard? He awakes that day to get his soldiers organized to go do their job. It might not be a job he enjoys, but a soldier does his duty. So there he is in a place where he has been before. But who could have imagined that this day his life would take a change and he would be remembered for thousands of years because on that day he would be at that holy place, the death of Jesus? How could he have known that this day would be different, for he would work in the shadow of the cross of Jesus?

Yet, there he is. As he watches and as he experiences the moments of Jesus on the cross... something happens to him. He watches this man who others seem to despise react. He watches the way He dies. He witnesses the odd events surrounding His death and in the end he confesses that surely this is the Son of God. Now many have argued that the centurion did not make a confession of faith, but one of observation that this was a righteous man. That is what Luke records, but Matthew and Mark record it differently and the point of Matthew and Mark recording this confession is important. For the events that bring this man to this confession involve an enlargement of consideration of God's grace, love and forgiveness.

The events around Jesus' death as recorded in Matthew reveal a moment that involves not just God's people the Jews, but the whole world. In reality, it involved all of creation. The fact that the first convert to the identity of Jesus recorded in scripture is a gentile Roman soldier should not be missed. A person who would be considered

an enemy of the Jewish Messiah is the first who comes to this conclusion about Jesus after His death.

Is there anyone who would have been thought to be excluded more than a Roman Centurion? He is a gentile and gentiles were not included as the people of God. He was Roman and God's people were looking forward to the day when Rome would be defeated and God's people would be free again from foreign occupation and rule. They hoped that the Messiah would lead them in this revolt toward freedom. He was a soldier. The one who spoke of peace transforms a man of war, turning the cheek and loving your enemy.

There is no person that could have personified the person who should be excluded from God's plan than the Roman Centurion and yet his is the first confession at the cross. Matthew and Mark knew exactly what they were doing when they recorded this moment and confession. Jesus' death had changed everything.

What brought this man to this confession? Matthew tells us of two natural events that occurred as part of Jesus' death on the cross. The first is the darkness, which had come across the earth for three hours. We interpret this darkness as the moment that God the Father turned from the God the Son as the sin of the world, your sin, my sin, the sin of everyone who had ever lived and who would ever live was placed on Jesus. In that moment, Jesus cries that prayer of forsakenness that seems almost beyond our understanding unless you have been there in that moment of feeling God is nowhere to be found. Unless you know the moment of God's silence, then you do not know the feeling of being lost, alone and forsaken. Jesus knew it as He took on our sin, our pain and its consequences. The soldiers noticed the darkness.

It is the next event, however that seems to bring the soldier to confession. At Jesus' death we are told that there was an earthquake. The earth shook and the rocks were split. That is the event that the soldier would have noticed. Matthew tells us that as the result of the earthquake there were two other signs. The curtain at the Temple was split into from the top to the bottom. In

other words, this was God's doing.

The curtain being described here in Matthew was the curtain that separated the Holy of Holies from the rest of the temple. In the Holy of Holies was God's dwelling place. It was a place only where the priests dare tread. It had been a place of mystery and only for a few. No more. With the tearing of the curtain God had in one moment, through the death of Jesus, become accessible to all. The Centurion would have not known of this at his moment of confession, nor would he have cared as a gentile man, but Matthew tells us that symbolically the death of Jesus has changed access to God's forgiveness.

Matthew also tells us that after Jesus' resurrection the bodies in the tombs, that had been broken open by the earthquake, came out and go into the city and appeared to many people. Notice carefully that those who are raised to the dead are done so, after Jesus' resurrection. Jesus is the first fruit of the resurrection. They follow His resurrection.

This is one of those odd passages only recorded by Matthew. The story of the holy people, or saints coming out of their graves upon the death and resurrection of Jesus, leave us with more questions than answers. Matthew does not give us a lot of details. Some suggest Matthew is using figurative language to tell us in incredible terms that from this moment on, death is defeated and if God can do this... nothing is impossible. Others say Matthew is reporting the news that he heard of those who were dead before Jesus' death were now alive after Jesus' resurrection. We don't have a lot of good answers, but here is what we can take away from this odd report by Matthew.

First, Jesus' death and resurrection is not just for those who would follow him historically.

Jesus' death and resurrection was also for those who had preceded him. Notice it was the holy people who were the people of God, who had by faith followed Him, as God had been revealed to them at this point in history. Now in the full of revelation of Jesus, they had not been excluded because of the historical timing of their lives.

Second, death has been defeated and the resurrection is not only for Jesus... it is for us all.

Matthew recorded the death of Jesus and the results to let us know that we have all been included. That was really what this was about. The Temple Curtain was torn. God's people no longer have to worry about burnt sacrifices and the burden of the law; they have been included in God's grace. Those who lived before Jesus were not left out. Jesus' death had included them as well. The Centurion's confession became the last act of inclusion. Not only had God's people historically been included in Jesus' work, but also all people are welcomed into God's grace.

It is in this moment that we are told that the Centurion, and the others who were witnessing Jesus death, are terrified or stand in awe and the Centurion utters his confession.

They stood in awe and uttered a confession. Today, as we stand in the shadow of the cross and transport ourselves back to the death of Jesus, it seems to me that there are some confessions we need to make.

In the shadow of the cross we need to confess surely this is the Son of God. When we confess that Jesus is the Son of God we are making an important confession. When we use the term Son of God we are equating Jesus with God. We are confessing that Jesus is not just another son or daughter of God, but that Jesus is who Jesus said He is... God's only unique Son.

In this confession we are saying that Jesus is not

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