

Soldiers, a sign and a son at the cross

The fulfilled time had come. Jesus was sentenced to death. It had been foretold. He had submitted to the Father – not my will but yours be done. He had resisted the temptation to call on legions of angels to free him from this agony. His disciples, bar one, had deserted him in His time of greatest need. And now He hung on a cross as a criminal between two criminals. Some were at the cross because of duty, some were there out of interest, some were there to mock and scorn, and some were there because of love.

John 19: 16 – 27

1) Soldiers

- The soldiers were at the cross because it was their duty. They had to be there.
- Soldiers were under orders to carry out the executions and many of them had probably done so on numerous occasions. This one had no particular significance for them. It was another day in the Roman military.
- What did the soldiers do at the cross?
 - They took charge of Jesus (vs. 16)
 - They crucified Jesus ((vs. 18)
 - They divided his clothes amongst them and cast lots for His undergarment (vs. 23 – 24). This was in accordance with the prophecy from Psalm 22: 18.
 - They mocked him and offered him wine vinegar (Luke 23: 36)
 - They taunted Him to save Himself (Luke 23: 37)
- Finally, after all the mockery and taunting, darkness came over the land, there was a mighty earthquake and the curtain of the temple was ripped from top to bottom.
- It was then that the attitude of the soldiers changed. They became terrified.
- The Centurion saw all that was happening and exclaimed, “Surely, He was the son of God,”
- Hardened soldiers who had carried out numerous crucifixions suddenly had a change of thinking, a change of heart.
 - From being the cruel executioners to confess Jesus as being the Son of God.
 - God can change the hardest of hearts at the cross.
 - God changed Paul from being a murderer and persecutor of the church to become the great apostle that we know Him as.
- God can change the hardest heart, not at just any cross but at the cross of Christ.
- Are we like the Roman soldiers, just doing our duty?
 - For many Christians coming to church and seeing Jesus through the eyes of tradition is a duty.
 - Many Christians are Easter and Christmas Christians. They feel that it’s their duty to go to church on those two occasions if not at any other time, but without knowing the reality of Jesus in their lives.
- We might have had many crosses – trials – in our lives which haven’t brought us to confess that Jesus is Lord, but have we come to the cross of Jesus and seen who He is and what He’s done for you?
- God has to sometimes bring a shaking in our lives for us to recognise the truth about Jesus.
- If there’s been a shaking in your life you need to ask yourself if God is trying to show Jesus to you because, although you’re looking at Him like the Roman soldiers, you can’t see the truth about Him for who He really is.

2) A sign

- Pilate had made a sign that said: Jesus of Nazareth, the king of the Jews.
 - However the chief priests protested saying that Pilate should write that He merely claimed to be the King of the Jews.
 - This sign of Pilate's was a point of contention for them as they had condemned Jesus for His claims and now Pilate had blatantly thrown fuel on the flame by putting the sign on the cross.
- The Messiah was prophesied to be the king of the Jews – the king of Israel. If this sign was true then the chief priests of the Jews had made the biggest mistake of their lives – they had just crucified their Messiah
 - Of course in their mind their Messiah was not going to die on a cross – He was going to establish His reign in Jerusalem, overthrow His enemies, and re-establish the kingdom of Israel to live in peace.
 - Surely this isn't the king of the Jews – the Messiah – hanging on a Roman cross as a criminal. This went against their whole concept of their Messiah.
- However Pilate refused to change the sign as He was experiencing His own personal turmoil with Jesus.
 - He had a discussion with Jesus on Him being the king of the Jews (John 18: 28 – 40)
 - His wife had a dream about Jesus' innocence (Matthew 27: 19)
- Are you like Pilate struggling over the true identity of Jesus but are swayed by the crowd?
- You want to believe the truth that He is the Messiah, the king, our Lord and Saviour, but your friends, family, community, religion, habits, vices, pull you away to give in to what is false.

3) A son

- The final group who were at the cross were a small group of people who loved Him. Four ladies and John, the disciple who Jesus loved.
 - John mentions at least 5 times in his Gospel that he is the disciple who Jesus loved
 - John 13: 23 One of them, the **disciple whom Jesus loved**, was reclining next to him.
 - John 19: 26 When Jesus saw his mother there, and **the disciple whom he loved** standing nearby, he said to her, "Woman, here is your son."
 - John 21: 20 Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them.
- John was at the cross because He had experienced the love of Jesus personally.
 - He knew that what Jesus was doing on the cross was His ultimate act of love, not only for the world in general, but for Him personally.
 - This was Jesus giving His life as a substitutionary sacrifice for Him dying in his place so that He can live forever.
 - This was Him being shamed so that He can live in freedom from guilt and sin.
 - This was Him dying so that He can be reconciled to the Father.
- John loved because He knew that Jesus first loved Him.
- While Jesus was hanging suffering on that cross He looked at John and his own mother and said, "woman, here is your son" and to John, " here is your mother".
 - John, take care of my mother as if she were your own mother.
 - Mother, take care of John as if he were me.
- His love for them was intensely personal, even being demonstrated in a time of extreme pain and suffering.
- They didn't care what the religious people, the crowds, the soldiers thought. They loved Him.
- Do we know His love in this way and do we love Him in the same way, not caring what others think about our commitment to Him?