

Responses to the Death of Christ

Scripture: Matthew 27:54–56

Code: 2398

INTRODUCTION

Matthew 27:54-56 is a brief but rich passage, "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. And many women were there beholding afar off, who followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering unto him, among whom were Mary Magdalene, and Mary, the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of Zebedee's children." In those verses and the parallel verses are four responses to the death of Christ--the same kind of responses we see today: saving faith, shallow conviction, sympathetic loyalty, and selfish fear. Two are responses of unbelievers and two of believers. These verses are part of an historical narrative, but they have practical application for our time.

I. SAVING FAITH

This is the best response any unbeliever could have. It is illustrated by the soldiers in Matthew 27:54: "When the centurion, and they that were with him guarding Jesus, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, Truly, this was the Son of God."

A. The Character of Christ's Crucifiers

1. Their responsibility

The centurion is the focal point of our discussion about the response of saving faith. He commanded over a hundred men--a man of some significance in the ranks of Roman soldiers. He and the men under his command were given the unique responsibility of guarding Jesus Christ. We can assume their assignment began at the start of the trial before Pilate early that morning. The centurion had to be aware of the issues surrounding Jesus. He was certain to have heard the accusations of the Jewish leaders. He also may have heard part of the conversation between Jesus and Pilate (John 18:33-38).

2. Their ignorance

The soldiers serving the centurion were the same men who nailed Jesus to the cross after mocking Him. They were uninformed about Judaism. They were irreligious pagans. They didn't have anything against Jesus; they were at the cross of Christ because their commander wanted them there.

Jesus was nothing more to them than some bizarre character claiming to be King, although looking at Him indicated He was anything but a King. By the time Jesus arrived at Pilate's Judgment Hall early Friday morning, the Jewish leaders had concluded their mock trial. After the trial they hit Him repeatedly in the face, leaving it disfigured. Jesus certainly didn't look the part of a King. He was dressed as a common man. Herod had his men put a robe on Him to mock His claim to be king. Furthermore, Jesus was silent--He didn't sound like a king. He didn't pontificate, pull rank, or call for His followers to rescue Him. The soldiers may have concluded He was mentally deranged because He accepted so much abuse without saying anything. When Jesus did have an opportunity to speak to Pilate, He spoke of a kingdom that was not of this world. So they concluded He was someone who had delusions of grandeur.

The soldiers were ignorant of whom they were dealing with. They served Pilate, which meant they were from Caesarea, a seaport city some sixty miles from Jerusalem. The Roman garrison for the

Roman occupation of Israel was headquartered there. Since Jesus centered His ministry primarily in Galilee and Jerusalem, they may never have seen Jesus before this day.

3. Their participation

The centurion knew the Jews hated Christ. He had heard them scream, "Crucify Him." The soldiers saw Pilate continually affirm the innocence of Jesus, all to no avail. They knew the Jewish leaders accused Jesus of claiming to be the Son of God and a King--that He was a threat to Rome and Judaism. But all that seemed ludicrous in view of the beaten and pathetic man now hanging on a cross. How could He be anything more than just a common criminal? To them He was a fake, a nobody.

B. The Fear of Christ's Crucifiers

1. The cause of their fear

Something happened that changed what the soldiers thought about Jesus. Matthew 27:54 says, "When the centurion, and they that were with him watching Jesus, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done [present participle: `were occurring']." When the sun instantly became dark at noon, when the earthquake split the ground and the rocks, and when the graves were opened, they knew something out of the ordinary was happening. Verse 54 says, "They feared greatly."

The Greek word translated "fear" is phobeo, from which we get the word phobia. The soldiers were overcome with sheer terror--a state of panic causing the heart to beat rapidly and the body to sweat profusely. A person feels terrible anxiety in the midst of such terror. The same word is used in Matthew 14:27 to describe the fear the disciples experienced when they saw Jesus walking on water and when Jesus revealed His glory on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt. 17:6-7).

2. The context of their fear

The soldiers were not afraid merely of the earthquake or the darkness. Inherent within their fear was spiritual awe--a reverential terror. They concluded that Jesus was not just another criminal or rebel.

3. The conviction of their fear

The centurion heard Jesus speak while He hung on the cross. He heard profound words that penetrated his heart. Now he had seen miraculous phenomena take place when Christ died. He knew something has gone wrong because the land convulsed in response to it. His fear indicates a sense of his sin. He feared he might be under the judgment of God. Although the soldiers were pagans, that possibility no doubt penetrated their hearts.

C. The Confession of Christ's Crucifiers

Their sense of guilt for having mocked and crucified Christ led the soldiers to another step. Fearing greatly, the centurion and some of his soldiers said, "Truly, this was the Son of God." Their fear indicates an awareness of their sin; their confession indicates salvation.

1. They affirmed Christ's Sonship

If their fear merely was natural human fear, they would have cried for help or run away. However theirs was awe reserved only for God. Mark 15:39 says, "When the centurion, who stood facing him [Christ], saw that he so cried out, and gave up the spirit, he said, Truly this man was the Son of God." It wasn't just the phenomena; the final words of Jesus drove the truth into his heart. He uses the word truly to make clear he had no doubt in his mind. He wasn't saying, "Maybe He's the Son of God." I believe he was affirming the divine Sonship of Jesus. Christ had just said, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit" (Luke 23:46). With His final words Jesus implied He was God's Son and the centurion affirmed it in Matthew 27:54.

How did the centurion know Jesus is God's Son? By both the phenomena and the demeanor of Jesus on the cross--His gracious spirit, His silence when rebuked, and His victorious statement of completing His divine mission. Yet the only way anyone can ever know Jesus is God's Son is by the Holy Spirit. When Peter said, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" Jesus said, "Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona; for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father, who is in heaven" (Matt. 16:16-17). Peter knew Jesus was the Son of God because the Holy Spirit told him

that. First Corinthians 12:3 says, "No man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Spirit." You can't come to that conclusion on your own. What happened to the centurion and some of the soldiers was a work of the Holy Spirit. Through Christ's attitude and words on the cross, and through the supernatural phenomena, the Holy Spirit brought them to an affirmation of faith that can only come from God.

2. They affirmed Christ's righteousness

The centurion also said, "Certainly this was a righteous man" (Luke 23:47). Why did he say "Certainly"? Once again he was affirming the truthfulness of his statement. Pilate said, "I am innocent of the blood of this righteous person" (Matt. 27:24). Pilate's wife said, "Have thou nothing to do with that righteous person" (Matt. 27:19).

3. They glorified God

Luke 23:47 says the centurion also glorified God.

He glorified the one true God, affirmed the righteousness of Jesus Christ, and declared Him to be the Son of God. That is saving faith. If the thief could receive a guarantee of salvation by saying simply, "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom," certainly the centurion could with his faith. There is no question in my mind that the centurion and perhaps several of his men were redeemed at the foot of the cross.

The Case of the Missing Article

Some have wanted to argue the validity of the centurion's faith based on linguistics. We find in Matthew 27:54 what is called an anarthrous construction in the Greek language--the phrase "the Son of God" has no definite article in it. The Greek doesn't translate to "the Son of the God," meaning the only God; it says theou huios--"Son of God." Some claim this pagan centurion was saying, "This man must be a son of a god"--that of all the Roman deities, the centurion supposedly thought of Jesus as some offspring or emanation from one those deities. I don't think that's the intent of the text. Let me show you why.

1. The Jewish leaders didn't use the article

The soldier used his title for Jesus based on the accusations of the Jewish leaders. According to Matthew 26:63 the high priest said to Jesus, "I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God." The Jews believed in only one God, and they were accusing Jesus of claiming to be the only Son of the only God. That was blasphemous to them.

According to John 19:4-5 Pilate brought Jesus before the crowd after having scourged and mocked Him. The Jewish leaders screamed, "Crucify him, crucify him!... he made himself the Son of God" (vv. 6-7). John used the same Greek construction for what the leaders said as Matthew uses for what the centurion said.

When Caiaphas said to Jesus, "Tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God," the article is used. However, when the same leaders accused Him in front of Pilate's court, the article is dropped. If the article is used in one place but not in another, yet they refer to the same thing, we can conclude that both statements refer to the same thing. In either case the leaders accused Jesus of a blasphemous claim to be the Son of God.

2. The disciples didn't use the article

Theou Huios was used by the disciples in Matthew 14:33. They said, "Of a truth, thou art the Son of God." We know they didn't mean, "Truly, You are a son of a god."

3. Jesus didn't use the article

The same two words were ascribed to Jesus in Matthew 27:43.

4. Gabriel didn't use the article

The angel Gabriel told Mary that her Son would be called "the Son of God [huios theou]" (Luke 1:35). The absence of an article doesn't mean you can translate the phrase, "a son of a god." The pagan centurion glorified God, affirmed Jesus as a righteous man, and called Him the Son of God. The Holy

Spirit did a work in his heart, bringing him to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. I am in agreement with Lutheran commentator Lenski, who said, "This Gentile, called Longinus in tradition, comes to faith beneath the dead Savior's cross" (The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel [Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1961], p. 1133).

D. The Redemption of Christ's Crucifiers

1. The Father's forgiveness

While being crucified, Jesus Christ redeemed His crucifiers. That speaks volumes about His grace, mercy, and love. When Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34), what did the Father do? He forgave them. Jesus' prayer was answered in the moment of His death. In the soldiers' fear I see a recognition of sin and in their confession I see salvation. When someone says, "I'm too evil; the Lord will never forgive me," he needs to understand that Christ forgives the worst of sinners.

2. The Scripture's fulfillment

Christ said, "If I be lifted up from the earth, [I] will draw all men to Myself" (John 12:32, NASB). As He was lifted up on the cross, He drew a thief and a group of soldiers to Himself. It is unspeakable love and grace that won those who killed Jesus on the cross.

G. A. Studdert-Kennedy, who lived from 1883-1929, wrote many beautiful poems about Jesus Christ. He wrote the following about the crucifixion scene:

And sitting down they watched Him there, The soldiers did; There, while they played with dice, He made His sacrifice, And died upon the cross to rid God's world of sin. He was a gambler, too, my Christ, He took His life and threw it for a world redeemed. And ere His agony was done, Before the westering sun went down, Crowning that day with crimson crown, He knew that He had won.

The best response anyone can have toward the gospel is saving faith. The centurion sets the standard.

II. SHALLOW CONVICTION

A. The Scene

Matthew doesn't comment on this response, but Luke does. Luke 23:47-48 says, "When the centurion saw what was done, he glorified God, saying, Certainly this was a righteous man. And all the people that came together to that sight, beholding the things which were done." All those present at the crucifixion witnessed the darkness, the earthquake, and the opening of the graves. They knew those things couldn't be explained humanly. Something was wrong, and they were the cause.

Perhaps they remembered that Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead and virtually banished disease from Palestine during His ministry. Maybe they remembered His cleansing of the temple and His profound teaching. After all, they once hailed Him as Messiah.

1. Initial conviction

Based on their understanding of the Old Testament, the people should have realized that God was judging them. They should have experienced guilt from their sin, and some did because Luke 23:48 says, "Beholding the things which were done, [they] smote their breasts, and returned." Their terror mixed with guilt and remorse.

Today people look at the cross and understand Jesus was there because of their sins. They feel bad about that. The cross can be overwhelmingly penetrating, even to an unbelieving heart. Imagine yourself at the scene of the crucifixion screaming for His blood. Then imagine witnessing the supernatural phenomena around you. You might realize then that you had violated holy God. Fear would overpower every other thought in your mind.

2. Eventual rejection

What is so shocking about verse 48 is not that they smote their chests, but that they returned. They went home. There was no salvation for them, just conviction. Many who hear the gospel today are

convicted, and perhaps shed tears. They become anxious, their heart beats faster, and beads of sweat break out on their brow. They know they're sinners, yet they reject Christ and continue on the path to hell. They go home, turn on the television, eat a sandwich, and watch a football game. The conviction passes and their life is back to normal. That's essentially what the crowd at the cross did. They felt sorry. They even felt guilty. They knew God was expressing His wrath and that they were the object of it. But that conviction soon passed. After all, at three o'clock the light came back and there weren't any aftershocks.

B. The Sequel

A few weeks later on the Day of Pentecost, a crowd gathered to hear the apostle Peter. No doubt many of them had been at the foot of the cross and beat on their breasts.

1. Confrontation

As Peter preached, he indicted them for killing Christ. He talked about the resurrection--how God raised Christ from the dead. In verse 36 he sums up his sermon, saying, "God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ." He confronted them with having crucified their Messiah.

2. Conviction

Verse 37 says, "When they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Being pricked in the heart is like beating on one's chest. They were stabbed with conviction, as if a great blade went right into their hearts. They hurt deeply because they recognized that they had killed their Messiah.

3. Repentance

Peter said to them, "Repent, and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (v. 38). Peter continued to "testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this crooked generation. Then they that gladly received his word were baptized; and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls" (vv. 40-41). Some of those who beat their chests at the scene of the cross were in that group. I thank God that some of them were confronted again and felt conviction. This time it led them to salvation. Some of the people at the foot of the cross never were saved. Once they went home the conviction passed. So many people are like that today. I pray to God that someday a Peter will cross their path and preach a message they won't let pass.

Godly Sorrow vs. Worldly Sorrow

The apostle Paul wrote 1 Corinthians to confront the Corinthians about their sin. Word came back to Paul that they were sorry about their sin. They had a right response to his letter--they wanted to clean up their church and their lives. Paul wrote this in his second epistle: "For though I made you sorry with a letter, I do not repent I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry but that ye sorrowed to repentance; for ye were made sorry after a godly manner For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of; but the sorrow of the world worketh death" (2 Cor. 7:8-10).

People who are sorrowful all the time will eventually find that it kills them. Maybe they'll take their own life, die from some illness, or become an alcoholic or drug addict. The sorrow of the world is despair without relief, which leads nowhere except to death. Godly sorrow leads to repentance, which leads to salvation and life. That's the difference between the soldiers and the crowd. The soldiers were repentant. Through the power of the Spirit of God and in answer to the prayer of Jesus, they were saved. The crowd was sorry, but theirs was an ungodly sorrow leading to despair and not salvation.

Ungodly sorrow has no repentance, only resentment. It resents being caught. It is sorry for itself, not for God. Godly sorrow hates the sin more than it hates being caught. You will find godly sorrow exhibited by someone who hates their sin because it is a defiance of holy God, not because it's created some problems in their life. Godly sorrow leads to repentance, which in turn leads to

III. SYMPATHETIC LOYALTY

Matthew 27:55 says, "Many women were there." The women present at the cross of Christ were characterized by sympathetic loyalty.

A. The Importance of the Women

The women stood afar off at the beginning of the crucifixion (v. 55). The soldiers kept some area clear between the cross and the crowd. The soldiers were closest, the rabble crowd of Jews that passed by were next, and the women were somewhere beyond them. Later, according to John 19:26, they had come close enough to the cross so that Jesus could speak to them. It was at that time He commissioned both Mary and John to care for each other. That tells me the women became more bold and courageous as time went on.

1. Their love

These women were loving and sympathetic, although their hopes and dreams were crushed. They couldn't see beyond tomorrow; they could only watch their Master die. Their loyalties ran so deep, and their hearts were so filled with love and sympathy, that they stayed with Jesus to the end. They didn't fear the Jews or the Romans. Nothing could overpower their love and sympathy for Christ.

A Characteristic of a Godly Woman

I believe that sympathetic loyalty is one of the most beautiful characteristics of a godly woman. Show me a godly woman and I'll show you a life marked by sympathy and loyalty extending beyond anything a man can usually produce in his life. These women were fearless. They didn't mind being identified with the crucified Christ, who had been mocked, scorned, and ridiculed by people in their society.

Where were the disciples? According to John 19:26-27, only John was at the cross. The other ten were nowhere to be found. At times John seemed to have the sympathetic heart that is most often found in a woman, yet he was anything but feminine since his nickname was Son of Thunder.

Mark links the centurion with the women. Having talked about the centurion, he says, "There were also women" (Mark 15:40). Certainly he fit better with the women than he would with the unbelieving crowd.

Commentator G. Campbell Morgan writes this of the women: "Hopeless, disappointed, bereaved, heartbroken; but the love He had created in those hearts for Himself could not be quenched, even by His dying; could not be overcome, even though they were disappointed; could not be extinguished, even though the light of hope had gone out; and over the sea of their sorrow there was no sighing wind that told of the dawn" (The Gospel According to Matthew [Old Tappan, N.J.: Revell, 1929], p. 318).

2. Their number

We don't know how women were at the cross. Jesus' ministry included many women. Luke 8:1-3 says that Jesus "went throughout every city and village, preaching and showing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God; and the twelve were with him, and certain women, who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, out of whom went seven demons; and Joanna, the wife of Chuzas, Herod's steward; and Susanna; and many others, who ministered unto him of their substance." They provided meals, clothing, and money to the Savior and His disciples as they went about their Galilean ministry.

3. Their service

Matthew 27:55 says they followed Jesus from Galilee. When Jesus left Galilee, He came to Jerusalem for Passover. The women, along with their families, followed Jesus south through Peraea,

across the Jordan into Jericho, up to Bethany, and then into Jerusalem. Their service began in Galilee and ended up at the foot of the cross. They remained loyal, sympathetic, unwavering, and faithful. David Thomas said, "He was the magnet of their souls. He held them there as the sun holds the planets" (The Gospel of St. Matthew: A Homiletical Commentary [Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1979], p. 545).

Matthew 27:55 says they ministered (Gk., diakoneo, "deacon") to him." That word actually refers to waiting on tables (cf. Luke 4:39, 10:40). Serving was the core of their service, not the perimeter. The apostle Paul said the widow who is to be cared for by the church should be "well reported of for good works, if she hath brought up children, if she hath lodged strangers, if she hath washed the saints' feet, if she hath relieved the afflicted, if she hath diligently followed every good work" (1 Tim. 5:10). At the heart of the woman's role is caring for the physical needs of her household as well as being involved in spiritual ministry. Women aren't limited to that, but that is the heart of their service.

4. Their privilege

Many think their role was demeaning, but that isn't the case at all. Those women were eyewitnesses to the death of Christ. One of them saw the risen Christ before any man did. In the early days of the church the primary sources for the reality of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ were those loyal, sympathetic women. You can be sure they held a special place of recognition in the early church. The disciples hid but the women stood by Christ. Don't underestimate the role of a woman. The Lord gave them the privilege of being the original eyewitnesses to the death and resurrection because they proved to be faithful.

B. The Identification of the Women

The Holy Spirit allows us the privilege of meeting a few of the women.

1. Mary Magdalene

This Mary was first mentioned in Luke 8:2. Jesus had cast seven demons out of her, and then redeemed her. (Don't confuse her with the woman of sin from Luke 7:37). She's always called Mary of Magdalene or Mary Magdalene. She was from Magdala, a little town on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee, south of Capernaum. She was called Mary of Magdalene because she had no husband or children. If she had a husband or children, she would be Mary the wife of, or Mary the mother of. Notice that the second woman mentioned in Matthew 27:56 is Mary the mother of. The next one is both the mother of and the wife of. She is the mother of Zebedee's children, another way of saying she is Zebedee's wife.

Notice that one woman is noted for her husband, another by her children, and the other by her town because she had no husband or children. I believe the Lord supports all those roles for women. A woman can have dignity as a single woman. We see that God had a marvelous and unique role for a single woman to play in the plan of God. Mary Magdalene was the first one to see the risen Christ. There is also great commendation for a woman who was a mother and a woman who was a wife. Mary Magdalene is an illustration of the importance of single women. Most women, however, are called to be married and have children, unless they are specially gifted in singleness.

2. Mary, the mother of James and Josés

Mark 15:40 calls her the mother of James the less so as not to confuse him with James, the brother of John, one of the sons of Zebedee. In John 19:25 she is called the wife of Clopas. James the less is also called James the son of Alphaeus. So Clopas and Alphaeus may be variations on the same name.

3. The mother of Zebedee's children

Mark tells us her name was Salome (Mark 15:40) and John tells us she was the sister of Mary, the mother of Jesus (John 19:25). That means James and John were Jesus' cousins.

I want you to see that women are identified by their marriage or their children because that is the distinct and wonderful role of most women. These women provided out of their substance for those who labored for the cause of Christ. God highly honored them by allowing them to be special

witnesses of His death and resurrection.

Extolling the Virtue of Women

When God wanted to extol the highest virtue of woman, He said the following in Psalm 113:1-5, 9, "Praise ye the Lord. Praise, O ye the servants of the Lord, praise the name of the Lord. Blessed be the name of the Lord from this time forth and for evermore. From the rising of the sun unto the going down of the same, the Lord's name is to be praised. The Lord is high above all nations, and his glory above the heavens. Who is like unto the Lord, our God, who dwelleth on high He maketh the barren woman to keep house, and to be a joyful mother of children. Praise ye the Lord." God doesn't make the barren woman to have a career and a briefcase, but to be a keeper of the house and to bear children. This is not to disparage those whom God has not blessed with children, or those who are single; it's just that Scripture says child-bearing is God's highest calling for women. That's supported in the way they're identified in the narrative of the gospel record.

God allowed the women to be eyewitnesses of His Son's death and resurrection because they were faithful. What about you? When the world is hostile toward Christ, do you fade away or do you remain steadfast? Can the world see you belong to Jesus Christ? Is your love and loyalty for Christ so strong that you stay attached to Him no matter what the cost? Are you unwavering in your commitment?

IV. SELFISH FEAR

You won't find this response in any verse, but it can be deduced by the absence of the disciples. Nothing is said about them because they weren't at the cross. Where were they?

A. Denying the Power of Faith

I would have thought Peter would be there. Matthew 26:75 says that after he denied Christ three times and heard the cock crow, "he went out, and wept bitterly." He poured out his heart to God for forgiveness. You would think that once he had gone through that he would stand by Christ. But after weeping he went back into hiding.

Matthew 26:56 tells us what happened to the disciples: "All the disciples forsook Him and fled." They were cowards when they should have been courageous. Jesus foretold Peter's denial by saying, "Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat" (Luke 22:31). You separate wheat from chaff by shaking it. Satan was going to shake Peter every way he could. But in verse 32 Christ says, "I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not." Did the disciples lose their salvation? No, because the Lord upheld them.

B. Violating the Principle of Discipleship

The disciples entered into a terrible time of cowardice. They were in a spiritual struggle. They violated the basic principle of discipleship from Matthew 10:38: "He that taketh not his cross and followeth after me, is not worthy of me." If anyone is going to be His disciple, he must be willing to give his life if necessary. At that time, the disciples weren't. When they thought they might lose their life, they were long gone. Satan was shaking them violently. But Jesus prayed that their faith wouldn't fail. No matter how violently Satan may shake the believer in times of doubt and fear, he will never lose his faith because it's in the hands of Jesus Christ.

It is sad that the disciples didn't stand by Jesus at His death. He died with only the women and John present. After all He had done for them, it's a tragedy that they weren't there.

There are times when we should stand for Christ in a particular situation, but we don't. Instead we hide. The sifting keeps us from enduring. We want to save our reputation, name, or career. We don't want to be named with Jesus Christ. You need to ask yourself about where you are. Do you need to respond to Christ with saving faith? Do you want to say with centurion, "Truly, this was the Son of God"? Are you like the crowd? Are you going to let the conviction pass? If you're a believer, are you

like the women? Do you loyally stand by Christ, whatever the cost? Or are you like the disciples, hiding somewhere so no one can find out whom you belong to?

"O Sacred Head, Now Wounded" is one of the most beautiful and moving hymns about the cross that's ever been penned. It was attributed to Bernard of Clairvaux and was translated into English by James Alexander in the nineteenth century.

O sacred Head, now wounded,
With grief and shame weighed down,
Now scornfully surrounded,
With thorns thine only crown,
O sacred Head, what glory,
What bliss till now was thine!
Yet, though despised and gory,
I joy to call thee mine.
What Thou, my Lord, hast suffered
Was all for sinners' gain:
Mine, mine was the transgression,
But Thine the deadly pain.
Lo, here I fall, my Savior!
'Tis I deserve Thy place;
Look on me with Thy favor,
Vouchsafe to me Thy grace.
What language shall I borrow
To thank Thee, dearest Friend,
For this Thy dying sorrow,
Thy pity without end?
O make me Thine forever;
And should I fainting be,
Lord, let me never, never
Outlive my love to Thee.

Focusing on the Facts

1. What is the best response any unbeliever can make to the crucifixion of Christ?
2. What happened that changed many of the soldiers' perspective of Jesus (Matt. 27:54)?
3. Describe the fear that the soldiers experienced.
4. What did their fear indicate?
5. What did their fear lead them to?
6. What was the centurion affirming when he said, "Truly, this was the Son of God" (Matt. 27:54)?
7. What is the only way anyone can know that Jesus is God's Son (Matt. 16:16-17)?
8. Explain how some discredit the centurion's statement that Jesus was the Son of God.
9. Who did Jesus Christ redeem while on the cross?
10. Why should the people at the foot of the cross realized that God was judging them?
11. How did the people respond to the phenomena that occurred at the crucifixion of Christ (Luke 23:48)?
12. How do we know that the conviction the people experienced at the cross didn't lead to salvation (Luke 23:48)?
13. When Peter preached on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2:36, what did he indict the people for?
14. What did the crowd do after they were convicted by Peter's sermon?
15. What are the main differences between godly sorrow and worldly sorrow (2 Cor. 7:8-10)?
16. What is an important characteristic of a godly woman?

17. How did the women serve Jesus during His ministry?
18. What great privilege did Christ grant to the women who remained loyal to Him while He hung on the cross?
19. Who was Mary Magdalene? Why is it significant that she is described by the town she was from (Luke 8:2)?
20. According to Psalm 113:9, how does God extoll the virtue of women?
21. Why weren't the disciples present at the cross of Christ?
22. What basic principle of discipleship did the disciples violate (Matt. 10:38)?

Pondering the Principles

1. Perhaps the most famous Christ uttered are, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). God answered Jesus' prayer, and He answered it not only for some Roman soldiers, but also for you. Before you were saved, how did you treat Christ? The treatment He suffered at the hands of those who crucified Him is no worse than the treatment He has received from every sinner. Meditate on the crucifixion scene. Remember what your sin cost Christ. Then remember that in spite of yourself, God saved you through the death of Christ on the cross. Thank God for His grace and forgiveness. And thank Christ for taking your place on that cross.
2. Reread 2 Corinthians 7:8-10 and the section dealing with godly and worldly sorrow . When you are convicted of sin, how do you respond? Do you exhibit godly sorrow or worldly sorrow? What grieves you most: the fact that you disobeyed God or the inconvenience that your sin caused you? Seek to respond in all circumstances in a way that is pleasing to God, and that includes your sorrow.
3. The followers of Christ responded in two ways when He was taken captive and then crucified. A few women along with John remained loyal and stayed with Him until His death. The rest fled in fear. Where are you when you need to be counted as one who belongs to Christ? Do you stand by the cross, or do you hide from the world? Matthew 10:38 gives us a principle of discipleship that all believers should follow. Memorize it.

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