



OPEN

Crosses are everywhere. We see them on churches. We see them on necklaces as jewelry. We see them as tattoos, on mountain tops, in cemeteries, and hanging on walls. When you see a cross, what do you see? As we come to Easter, we look again at the cross. From Palm Sunday to the Sunday following Easter, in this message series we look at 3 perspectives on the cross through the eyes of those in the gospels who witnessed Jesus' death and then resurrection: the centurion, Joseph of Arimathea, and Mary. All were changed. Each began to see Jesus and the cross from a new perspective that changed their lives.

This week, as we come to Palm Sunday and Jesus' triumphal entry, we look at one of the Roman centurions responsible for ensuring Jesus' death just 5 days later. The synoptic gospels (Mark, Matthew and Luke) each mention this centurion who at seeing Jesus die on the cross said, "Surely this man was the Son of God!" At the cross, the centurion came to see Jesus as God – the one who is truly in control who makes outsiders 'insiders,' and who gave up his life for the world. Through the eyes of the centurion, we see the LOVE God was demonstrating in sending his Son to die in our place. Can you see the love?

REFLECT

- At the beginning of the week of Jesus' crucifixion, in Mark 11, how do the people of Jerusalem welcome Jesus? Now, in chapter 15:12-15, just 5 days later, what do the crowds say?
- In Mark 15:33, Mark's gospel says the physical environment changed at the point of Jesus' death. How so? In Luke's gospel 23:45, what does it also say about this? And in Matt. 27:51-53, what else is said about what happened to the earth at the point of Jesus death?
- In our passage in ch. 15, list those mentioned there at Jesus death?
- In v. 34, Jesus quotes Psalm 22:1. Read the whole psalm.

DISCUSS

- As a discussion opener, why do you think crosses are so popular? Why do you think so many people wear them or have them? What do you think the emblem of the cross means to most people?
- In thinking about the way Jesus was welcomed the final week he entered Jerusalem before going to the cross, why do you think he received the kind of welcome he did? Why do you think, if you could guess, the crowd responded so differently just 5 days later? What do you think this kind of drastic change says about our potential as human beings? And even our attitude towards God at times?
- On the day of Jesus' crucifixion, the gospels say there was a physical reaction in the environment to Jesus' death. Why do you think that was? In the bigger picture, what do you think this tells us about the connection between the physical and the spiritual?
- There are not a lot of up close details about the moment of Jesus' death, but from what we do know from Mark's gospel, and the others, what do you think it was about Jesus' death, maybe, that changed the centurion's perspective about Jesus in that moment?
- Let's put ourselves in the centurion's 'sandals' for a moment. From a Roman point of view, who was in control of Jerusalem? Who was responsible for ensuring Jesus' death? After seeing Jesus' die, how different do you think the centurion's thoughts may have been about who is really in control of things? Or, ultimately, responsible for Jesus' death? How might that apply to our outlook on things in life?
- Mark uses the centurion's change of perspective to help us see Jesus' true identity. The centurion was an outsider to Jewish culture and religion. How did the cross change that for the centurion? What is the significance of Mark mentioning the Temple curtain being torn, and being torn from the top down? How does this speak to 'outsiders'?

APPLY/PRAY

- 1. Jesus is declared King, take time to declare and thank Jesus for his Lordship.** Ask him to help you bring issues of your life under his direction...share with one another those things as you pray together.
- 2. Pray for a greater understanding of what God has done for you.** Ask Jesus for greater insight to the importance of the cross to your life.