

# Suicide Mission

*Easter Sunday*

April 5, 2015



I put the subject of today's message to an informal vote, and you overwhelmingly chose the centurion at the cross. **He's the Roman commander with the front row seat.**

**Do you picture the soldiers seated?**

[Matthew tells us they sat] And **sitting down**, they kept watch over him there. - Matthew 27:36 NIV



They *sat*, in strategic arrangement, because it was typically a long, drawn out, ordeal.

**There was *only one* centurion at the cross.** And, I've gotten to know him much better this week. Interesting guy. Battle hardened. Death desensitized. Calloused career soldier.

*And ... he's inflicted death to a degree we can hardly imagine. But, I like him! You take the good with the bad.*

Still from Sega's: Total War, Rome II

**From the moment they met, and even as the nails were driven in, Jesus could see that the centurion would be the very first to proclaim Him, as the Son of God, after His death.**



No small thing for a Roman military man! Every Roman coin in his day, declared Caesar Tiberius as "son of the divine Augustus". **Caesar was the *only man* a good Roman would call the "Son of God"**, let alone the Commander *at the cross*. And yet, the centurion declares: "Surely *this man* was the Son of God!"

So, what caused a hard-skinned, well-ordered, death-numb, decorated commander to make a spontaneous, treacherous, public confession?!

The one thing Jesus *knew* He was *gonna do* to *convert* this guy.

**Ever think Jesus might've had second thoughts on the cross?** "What have I done?! I want off this thing! It's too late now!" Well, we know there were no second thoughts *because of* what the Centurion saw: the unnerving way in which Jesus met death.

He thought he'd seen it all. But, *this* got him back on his feet.

And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, **heard his cry** and **saw how he died**, he said, “Surely this man was the Son of God!” – Mark 15:39 NIV

He saw something so staggering he was converted on the spot.

The centurion, **seeing what had happened**, praised God **[He’s also the first to worship Jesus after His death!]** and said, “Surely this was a righteous man.” **[So, what happened?! Well, whatever it was, He wasn’t the only one who saw it]** When all the people who had gathered to witness this sight [i.e. Jesus’ death] **saw what took place**, they beat their breasts and went away. **[So, what took place?!]** – Luke 23:46-48 NIV

Wanna know what happened? *All you had to do was ask ... or seek, or knock.*



The Centurion and his men began as mockers.

They offered him wine vinegar and said, “If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself.” **[Because]** There was a written notice above him, which read: THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS. – Luke 23:36b-38 NIV

Where do you think he got the idea to call Jesus the Son of God?

From the hissing lips of the other scoffers.

Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, “... Come down from the cross, **if you are the Son of God!**” In the same way the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders mocked him. - Matthew 27:39-41 NIV



He’s seen countless crucifixions.

And there’s a pattern: Raging. Cursing. Bargaining. Pleading. Despair. Sobbing. Madness. Moaning. Detachment. Death.

**Medical experts agree that Jesus suffered one of the most grueling and painful forms of capital punishment ever devised. It was intense while allowing death to linger, sometimes for days.**

Nails continued to send bolts of pain through the nerves. Body position made breathing extremely difficult and unstable. **A symphony of pain, played out with every movement.**

Cramps. Spasms. Thirst. Fever. Exposure. Shame. Torment. Exhaustion.

**But if you rest, or relax, you suffocate.**

And yet, **Jesus radiated compassion even as He was being crucified.**

He expressed sympathy for His *tormentors*, and asked God to forgive ‘em for their lack of understanding. (Luke 23:34) He made living arrangements for His mother. (John 19:26-27) And, He comforted the thief who was dying beside Him. (Luke 23:39-43)

*This is not a typical day at the office for the centurion! And, if that was His heart for us while He was on the cross, just imagine His heart for you now that He's on the throne!*



That was the first three hours; then came three inexplicable hours of darkness.

**This is when the Light of the World took on the full weight of sin and death, and the universe went dim under the load.**

What He endured is veiled in darkness. No one recorded what happened in the dark. But, the Centurion had a front row seat.

And, Matthew records a 750-year-old prophecy regarding the Messiah and the gentiles.

The people who were sitting in darkness saw a great Light, and those who were sitting in the land and shadow of death, upon them a Light dawned. – Matthew 4:16 NAS

What was it that finally penetrated the *centurion's* darkness?

With a loud cry, **Jesus breathed his last.** – Mark 15:37 NIV

Jesus called out with a loud voice, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.” When he had said this, **he breathed his last.** – Luke 23:46 NIV

I don't think that's a euphemism for death; I think it's the means. **I think it's the moment Jesus chose to stop breathing.** I think it means what it says: “he breathed his last”.



... he **bowed his head** and **gave up his spirit.** – John 19:30b NIV

In the movies it's the opposite. He's gasping, struggling to stay alive, and then, overcome, He dies and drops His head.

But, **it wouldn't be much of a sacrifice if the priest had to wrestle it out of the reluctant hands of the one offering it.**

**The commitment must be total to be true.**

**Jesus was totally committed as our faithful High Priest offering the sacrifice on our behalf ... and the willing Sacrifice *itself!***

**Nobody took His life. He gave it. Both Offering and Offerer!**

“The reason my Father loves me is that **I lay down my life** — only to take it up again. **No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord.** I have **authority to lay it down** and **authority to take it up again.**” – John 10:17-18a NIV

**He was in complete control the entire time.**

As He said to Peter, when Peter cut off the guy's ear, "Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? [i.e. 72,000] But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled ...?" (Mat 26:53)

**He had to have an out all the way to the bitter end, so we could know, beyond shadow of a doubt, that He had no second thoughts.**

And He had to lay down His own life as a willing Sacrifice.

**"Wait. Are you saying Jesus committed suicide on the cross?!"**

Yes ... *and no*. **What do you call it if a man throws himself on a grenade to save his friends? Heroic! Greater love has no one. There's a big difference between taking your life, and giving your life for others. The first is selfish, the second is noble.**

That word "**bowed**" [klinō] is remarkable. It's the same word Jesus uses when a teacher of the Law says, "I'll follow you wherever you go."

Jesus replied, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to **lay** [klinō] **his head**." – Matthew 8:20 NIV

It carries the idea of bowing or laying down the head to rest. And, **In His final act of submission, He didn't just bow His head; He laid it down to rest.** And relaxed. And breathed His last.

**He had found the tree in which to make His nest.**

**And the hole, carved in the earth, from which He would rise.**

So, He called out with a loud voice. And, when the centurion, below Him, heard His cry, he looked up. At the very moment, we're told, Jesus looked down. And, their eyes would've locked.

And, the centurion would've seen what Jesus knew he would see, from the moment they met: **a fearless expression of faith and trust and confidence and love and power under perfect control.**

**Tenderness in the face of terror. Transfixed on the tranquil eyes of a man drowning, in victory. No panic. No second thoughts. A peace that passes all understanding.**

And in that moment, the face of God.

Life Father like Son.

*This* is what the centurion saw.

**What do you see?**

**And, more importantly, how do you respond?**