

- The Centurion, and the other guards,
- Put there to keep people from stopping the crucifixion
- When they saw how Jesus died, a beaten, slashed, nail-suspended preacher.
- His face crimson with blood
- His bones peeking through the torn flesh, his body heaving for air.
- Hearing his merciful declaration of forgiveness
- Seeing the vindication of the power of God,
- All they could do, was humble themselves, admit their wrong, and acknowledge the truth
- “Surely this was the Son of God!”

- Do we understand the implications of the cross?
- A pagan ex-con and a pagan centurion, saved by their response to the cross!
- Why are we uncomfortable with an ex-con walking the golden streets, who seems to know more about grace than a 1,000 theologians?
- Why don't we like it?
- Because one of the hardest things to do, is to be saved by grace.

- There's something in us that reacts to God's free gift.
- We have some weird compulsion to create laws, and regulations, that will make us worthy of our gift
- It's called pride ... because to accept grace means to realize we are helpless to save our selves.

- Jesus became a sin offering for us He took our place.
- Your sins are put to his account, his perfect life is accredited to your account.
- On the cross God treated Jesus as if He lived your life, so that He could treat you as if you lived His.

- You're bulletin says, “The gift”
- Today we brought our gifts & presented them to each other & to Jesus
- But as we celebrate this resurrection Sunday, I feel compelled to ask, “what have you done with God's gift”
- How have you dealt with the cross?
- Have you been forced to the cross?
- Are you, right now, foolish at the cross?
- Or have you truly been forgiven through the cross?

(Taken from “Your Face In The Crowd” by Ryan Johnson – Sermon Central)

How Do You Deal With The Cross?

David Hibbert – April 16, 2006

The Mystery Of The Cross

- The cross
 - It's tragedy summons all sufferers.
 - It's absurdity attracts all critics.
 - It's hope lures all searchers.

 - History has idolized it, despised it, gold plated it, burned it, worn it, and trashed it.
 - History has done everything to it, except ignore it.
 - That's the one option that the cross does not offer ... no one can ignore it!
 - You can't ignore a piece of lumber that suspends the greatest claim in history.
 - A crucified carpenter claiming that he is God on earth!

 - We can't ignore the cross
 - Each one of us must individually choose, how we will personally deal with the cross
 - Matthew 27:32-56 describes 3 types of people, who came close to the cross.
 - Let's see how each type of person dealt with the cross
- 1. Forced To The Cross (Matthew 27:32-37)**
- Matthew 27:32, NIV – “As they were going out, they met a man from Cyrene, named Simon, and they forced him to carry the cross.”
- Simon, a Jewish man, a believer in God, a religious man
 - And this religious man was forced to the cross, to carry it on Jesus' behalf

 - Perhaps you are like this man, in that you feel forced to the cross
 - Forced, because you felt obligated by your spouse,
 - Forced, because your parents dragged you here
 - Forced, because you felt your children need it
 - Forced, because of tradition
 - Forced, because of the need for a spiritual reputation

- The tragedy:
- Although Simon was the closest to the cross, he was never changed by it.
- The lesson:
- You can be close to the Cross, but far from Christ.

2. Foolish At the Cross (Matthew 27:38-41)

Matthew 27:35, NIV – *When they [the soldiers] had crucified him, they divided up his clothes by casting lots.*

Matthew 27:39, NIV – *Those who passed by [the crowd] hurled insults at him, shaking their heads.*

Matthew 27:41, NIV – *In the same way the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders mocked him.*

- Who were the foolish? The soldiers, the crowd, and the religious leaders
- The soldiers played games at the cross, they sat at the base of the cross, and gambled for Jesus' clothes
- Often, we play games too.
- We pretend that we're something we're not
- We turn the grace of God into rules and regulations.
- We use the words of Jesus, to manipulate others, rather than speak life to them
- We substitute a vibrant encounter with God, with a religious-looking liturgy
- We sing "just as I am", but then have all sorts of behavioural requirements
- We pray for the lost on Sunday, but then live like them on Monday
- We scramble for status and attention, using service for personal gain
- We play games!
- The crowd hurled insults at Jesus, in fact, the other gospels says they spit on Jesus
- Sadly, we do that today
- We insult the blood of Christ that destroyed our division with God, by continuing to allow division with others
- We spit on the sacrificial death of Jesus that bought our forgiveness, by refusing to forgive others
- We insult the price that was paid for our sins, by choosing to live selfish or mediocre lives

- Every act of pride, arrogance, selfishness, jealousy, resentment, or unforgiveness is an insult to what Jesus did on the cross
- The religious leaders mocked Jesus
- Their education and pride would not allow God to die on the cross for them
- The whole concept of the cross, was foolishness to them
- Today, we often mock the method of God,
- By refusing to let Jesus' death be sufficient payment for our sins, and instead trying to earn the approval of God
- By living as if there were additional requirements in order to have God's favour
- By punishing ourselves and others for their failures, when that punishment has already been paid for by the blood of Jesus Christ
- By not allowing Christ's sacrifice on the cross to be the only and full payment for our sins, we mock what Jesus did
- The tragedy:
- We can be close to the timber of the cross, but far from the blood of the cross
- The lesson:
- You can touch the cross, but never let the cross touch you.

3. Forgiven Through The Cross (Matt. 27:45-54; Luke 23:39-43)

Luke 23:42, NIV – *Then he [the criminal] said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."*

Matthew 27:54, NIV – *When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they ... exclaimed, "Surely he was the Son of God!"*

- The criminal was the least likely candidate.
- A convicted criminal is asking God for eternal life.
- He deserves Hell but he gets Heaven!
- "Any chance you could put a good word in for me?" asked the criminal
- "Consider it done", replied Jesus
- In the world's value system, measured by appearance and performance, a man with nothing to give, gets it all