

The Roman centurion was equivalent to a Captain in the Roman Army. The Roman Centurion was often of the humblest origin; he had been promoted from the ranks simply on account of bravery and military efficiency. At the drill, on the march, and in battle, they were at the same time the role models and the leaders of the soldiers. The Roman centurion was a skilled professional who could be relied on to run a legion on campaign and in battle.

John 19:30

30When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, **It is finished**: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost.

The Centurion

{Many witnessed the crucifixion of our Lord and Savior Jesus The Christ, among them a pagan Roman Centurion. This is his story.}

I'm a Roman centurion. I serve, not in my home country, but in this God-forsaken land of stones and scorpions. I have about 100 men in my command. But don't be impressed. I'm just a grunt in the Roman army. I do whatever I'm told. A soldier has his duty. Soldiering is never pretty work, but where would we be without armies? Ask yourself that. The Roman sword and spear are the only foundation for peace in this world. Maybe someday someone will run the world without armies. I'd like to see them try. I'm not saying that I enjoy everything I'm ordered to do. But you get used to it. You lose certain sensibilities over the years. I thought I was as hard as any other soldier. Until that day.

Actually, it began late the night before when my commander sent word to our barracks at the Antonio fortress. The Jews had come to the fortress full of their confused noise about some traitor they wanted to arrest. They wanted Roman soldiers to accompany them.

There was no guessing what they really were up to. You never know what kind of crazy fanatics you'll come up against in this cursed land. This was the time of their Feast of Deliverance, and it did not take too many brains to imagine some "deliverer" taking a swipe at Rome as part of the festivities.

So I took several hundred men with me. We went east out of the city across the Kidron Valley to an olive garden. A strange company we were; led by an informant named Judas, at his heels a group of angry priests and religious leaders, a mob with clubs and torches. They had their temple police with them. I had to wonder, "What kind of traitor needs to be arrested with both Roman soldiers and Jewish scribes, their clubs and torches alongside the iron of our spears and swords?"

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We arrived at the olive grove and I got my first look at this traitor. We had come with a small army for this one man? Judas kissed Him; that was the signal. Then for an instant a sudden wave of sheer panic swept over me. The whole troop convulsed in a moment of blind confusion and lurched backward; there were soldiers all over the ground. If there had been an opposing force in the garden that night, we would have been helpless before it.

John 18:2-13

2And Judas also, which betrayed him, knew the place: for Jesus oftentimes resorted thither with his disciples.

3Judas then, having received a band *of men* and officers from the chief priests and Pharisees, cometh thither with lanterns and torches and weapons.

4Jesus therefore, knowing all things that should come upon him, went forth, and said unto them, **Whom seek ye?**

5They answered him, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus saith unto them, **I am he**. And Judas also, which betrayed him, stood with them.

6As soon then as he had said unto them, **I am he**, they went backward, and fell to the ground.
7Then asked he them again, **Whom seek ye?** And they said, Jesus of Nazareth.
8Jesus answered, **I have told you that I am he: if therefore ye seek me, let these go their way:**
9That the saying might be fulfilled, which he spake, Of them which thou gavest me have I lost none.
10Then Simon Peter having a sword drew it, and smote the high priest's servant, and cut off his right ear.
The servant's name was Malchus.
11Then said Jesus unto Peter, **Put up thy sword into the sheath: the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?**
12Then the band and the captain and officers of the Jews took Jesus, and bound him,
13And led him away to Annas first; for he was father in law to Caiaphas, which was the high priest that same year.

It was nearly dawn when the Jews brought their prisoner to the governor's judgment hall, clamoring for Pilate. The Jews had finished their own trial and wanted the governor to approve an execution. Pilate was not interested; it was a matter of their religion. Then they put it in political terms. Jesus claimed to be King of the Jews. They demanded that Pilate sentence Him to death for treason against Caesar. It was easy to see that this man was no threat to Rome. The governor was not convinced that Jesus was guilty of any capital crime. But Pilate wanted to appease the Jews, so he told me to have the Nazarene flogged. I gave the nod. My men scourged Him, opening His back to deep wounds, shredding the flesh until pieces--well, if you've ever seen a Roman flogging, you don't need my words. But the scourging was not enough for the Jews. They screamed for His crucifixion. Pilate finally gave in. The men enjoyed the sport. First we took Him into the Praetorium and gathered the whole battalion. They mocked the prisoner because He had said He was King of the Jews. One of them pulled some thorns beside the wall and fashioned a crown. I'd seen that kind of thing before. But for the first time in many years, I winced as they pushed it into His brow. They slapped Him, spat upon Him, ridiculed Him. I knew we were doing the right thing and I fought against the new feelings inside. You must rule with power and fear, or you cannot rule. At least, that is what we had always been taught.

John 18:28-40

28Then led they Jesus from Caiaphas unto the hall of judgment: and it was early; and they themselves went not into the judgment hall, lest they should be defiled; but that they might eat the passover.
29Pilate then went out unto them, and said, What accusation bring ye against this man?
30They answered and said unto him, If he were not a malefactor, we would not have delivered him up unto thee.
31Then said Pilate unto them, Take ye him, and judge him according to your law. The Jews therefore said unto him, It is not lawful for us to put any man to death:
32That the saying of Jesus might be fulfilled, which he spake, signifying what death he should die.
33Then Pilate entered into the judgment hall again, and called Jesus, and said unto him, Art thou the King of the Jews?
34Jesus answered him, **Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or did others tell it thee of me?**
35Pilate answered, Am I a Jew? Thine own nation and the chief priests have delivered thee unto me: what hast thou done?
36Jesus answered, **My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence.**
37Pilate therefore said unto him, Art thou a king then? Jesus answered, **Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice.**
38Pilate saith unto him, What is truth? And when he had said this, he went out again unto the Jews, and saith unto them, I find in him no fault *at all*.
39But ye have a custom, that I should release unto you one at the passover: will ye therefore that I release unto you the King of the Jews?

Matthew 27:26-31

26Then released he Barabbas unto them: and when he had scourged Jesus, he delivered *him* to be crucified.

27Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the common hall, and gathered unto him the whole band *of soldiers*.
28And they stripped him, and put on him a scarlet robe.
29And when they had platted a crown of thorns, they put *it* upon his head, and a reed in his right hand: and they bowed the knee before him, and mocked him, saying, Hail, King of the Jews!
30And they spit upon him, and took the reed, and smote him on the head.
31And after that they had mocked him, they took the robe off from him, and put his own raiment on him, and led him away to crucify *him*.

I led the execution detail to the hill outside of town. Jesus had to carry His own cross, like any other convict. We crucified Him with two others who had been sentenced. Some of the chief priests were there; an unusual audience for a crucifixion. They weren't finished mocking. They said, "If you're really who you claim to be, come down from that cross and save yourself." My men jeered too. "If you're the king of the Jews, save yourself."

Matthew 27:38-43

38Then were there two thieves crucified with him, one on the right hand, and another on the left.
39And they that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads,
40And saying, Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest *it* in three days, save thyself. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross.
41Likewise also the chief priests mocking *him*, with the scribes and elders, said,
42He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him.
43He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God.

I usually joined, too. But I couldn't. This man was no criminal. And He didn't whimper or plead like the others. I've never seen anyone who knew how to die. No cursing, no spite, no fear. I mean, everyone loses their nerve or struggles or whimpers. It's only natural. But not Him. I don't mean He didn't suffer. Everyone suffers. It's just the way He took it. They curse or they cry. They blaspheme their gods. I've seen the toughest criminals terrified. You find out what a man really believes at the cross. You see who he is. And this one was different.

The funny feeling I had at the scourging grew in me, stronger than ever. Even though I had been trained to believe that crucifixion was the only way to rule, that it was the final solution for all human crime--but watching Him on that cross--this was not Roman justice.

At midday, the darkness came. I don't mean the sun was shaded. I mean inky darkness. Many of the spectators lost their nerve and left. But, of course, an execution guard has to remain until the prisoners are dead. Obviously, we can't let a prisoner's friends get him down before the work is done.

We usually rotate watches because the strong ones can last two or three days. But as the hours passed, I could see that this man was really close. I stood close and watched. He looked upward and said, "Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit." And then He died. I mean, He chose the moment. Death didn't happen to Him, dragging Him away, catching Him off guard, struggling to get away. Just like a man chooses his next action, chooses a moment to sleep or sing or eat, He died. On purpose. Just like that. Nobody has that kind of power over death. It was a miracle. I heard myself say, "Certainly this was a righteous man."

Luke 23:44-46

44And it was about the sixth hour, and there was a darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour.
45And the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was rent in the midst.
46And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, **Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit:** and having said thus, he gave up the ghost.
47 Now when the centurion saw what was done, he glorified God, saying, Certainly this was a righteous man.

I haven't been the same since. I will never be able to look at a cross the same way again. This God-forsaken land. Holy men and scorpions. I never expected that a man on a cross could change me so. It was the way He died. I'm not the hardened Roman soldier I once was. I have seen the death of a truly righteous man. Now I'll never rest until I find out who He was.

Mark 15:39

39And when the centurion, which stood over against him, saw that he so cried out, and gave up the ghost, he said, Truly this man was the Son of God.

An encounter with Jesus will change your life forever. As the pagan centurion found out being witness to the trials and execution of Jesus Christ. As the centurion “fought against the new feelings inside” so still do many today. Unwilling to humble their heart and give their lives to Jesus. They are so caught up in the world and the idols of this world. When you consider the cross as the centurion said “ you find out what a man really believes at the cross”. “You see who he is”. “And this one was different.” You see at the cross we see the cost of sin. We see what we really deserve and it is not pretty. At the cross the ugliness of sin is in full view. But also at the cross as the hymn so beautifully states - Alas! and did my Savior bleed And did my Sov’ reign die? Would He devote that sacred head For such a worm as I? At the cross we see the lamb slain for the sins of the world. The perfect sacrifice in our place, for our sins. Jesus holds power over death and has the gift of eternal life in heaven for those that believe. As the centurion came to believe after his encounter with Jesus “ certainly this was a righteous man, truly this was the Son of God”. If you are lost so too can you know these things if you will just admit that you are a sinner, and “That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.” **Romans 10:9**

AMEN

*NOTE: words of the centurion taken from ‘Back To The Bible – The 12 Voices of Easter.