

## Title: “Centurion’s View of the Cross”

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Genesis 4:1-12 & Matthew 27:50-54

3/18/2020

**Lesson:** *When Abel was murdered, his blood cried out for justice and vengeance. God heard that cry and brought just judgement upon Cain. But the blood of Christ - the precious blood of Christ - did not cry out for vengeance against the centurion. And it doesn't cry out for justice and vengeance against you and me. The blood of Christ cries out for mercy and grace. It pleads to God, not that justice might be done, but that justice has been done. It cries out not for condemnation but for justification.*

### Message:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

Tonight’s message comes from both Matthew 27, verses 50-54 and Genesis 4:1-12. I would like to start by reading the passage from Genesis.

Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, “I have gotten<sup>a</sup> a man with the help of the LORD.”<sup>2</sup> And again, she bore his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a worker of the ground.<sup>3</sup> In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground,<sup>4</sup> and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering,<sup>5</sup> but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So, Cain was very angry, and his face fell.<sup>6</sup> The LORD said to Cain, “Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen?<sup>7</sup> If you do well, will you not be accepted?<sup>a</sup> And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is contrary to<sup>a</sup> you, but you must rule over it.”

<sup>8</sup> Cain spoke to Abel his brother.<sup>a</sup> And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him.<sup>9</sup> Then the LORD said to Cain, “Where is Abel your brother?” He said, “I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?”<sup>10</sup> And the LORD said, “What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground.<sup>11</sup> And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand.<sup>12</sup> When you work the ground, it shall no longer yield to you its strength. You shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth.”

This is God’s Word.

Tonight, if you stop and listen, you will hear the voice of Abel's blood still crying out to God from the ground. Anywhere you stand in this world, and at any time you stand there, you can hear that call. You don't have to listen closely because the voice is loud and the only way to really block it out is through the distractions of your daily life. The blood of Abel has been crying out since the day he was killed, and it hasn't yet ceased; it is as loud today as it was at that moment of his murder. Can you hear it?

<brief pause>

On May 20, 1944, Abel's blood could be heard crying from the ground in Auschwitz as a fourteen-year-old arrived from another concentration camp. He records the night in this way:

The crematorium greeted us with its horrible tongues of flame coming out of its smokestacks. Those of us able to march set out toward the camp on foot and had to carry the sick. Many of the elderly refused to cooperate with the SS, which had taken the last little piece of food from them. They were killed on the spot. After midnight we entered the camp. In the camp we went to join the Czechs; for the first two days we got nothing to eat.

That night, as he was walking towards Auschwitz, do you think he heard the voice? Do you think he recognized it as Abel's blood calling out to God for justice? Calling out for vengeance against his enemy?

He continues:

In the camp it was well known that every transport was gassed after six months. I had been in the camp a month when the oldest transport was gassed. They took us immediately to the selection, at which the strongest men and women were sorted out. The remainder were gassed.

In the time that followed he was a witness to acts of unimaginable violence and to thousands of executions by various means. Do you think that the voices of these thousands, and the millions of others that were murdered in similar ways, joined with Abel's? Did the ground open up to accept their blood, too?

There are many, too many events all throughout history, from the time of Cain to the time of Jesus, to present time where the ground has opened its mouth in response to these acts of injustice. Where we see the blood flow down into it but where the voices of the victims, not silenced after their final breath, have been raised up, upward into the chamber room of God.

<brief pause>

Alexandria Hill, age 2, was removed from her biological parents for what the county termed "neglectful supervision." It seems that after her parents had put Alexandria to sleep, they smoked marijuana. A neighbor detected the odor and called the police. That was when Alexandria was removed from her home and placed into the care of a foster couple. Nine

months later, two-year-old Alexandria was dead, and several months after that, the foster mother was guilty of capital murder and sentenced to life without parole.

God heard Alexandria's voice, even after it ceased to be heard here on Earth.

But here's a statement of comfort: God said to Cain, "The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground." It may not sound like it, but these *are* words of great comfort. How wonderful it is to know that there is no mediator, that the cry of Alexandria, the victims from the camps, that Abel, and that our own cries of injustice go *directly* to the judgement-seat of God; he hears every single one of them, and he answers them *all*. The injustice experienced throughout the world, in all times, and in all places, does not escape God's notice or response. He is a God of judgement; he brought it upon Cain, and he will bring it upon everyone else. But hear this! When he doesn't act in the way that we demand, or in the time that we expect, it's a reflection of a failure of our faith, not a failure of *His* judgement.

<brief pause>

We read tonight in Matthew about the centurion. Starting in verse 50:

<sup>50</sup> And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit.

<sup>51</sup> And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split. <sup>52</sup> The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, <sup>53</sup> and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many. <sup>54</sup> When the centurion and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe and said, "Truly this was the Son<sup>of</sup> of God!"

Did he hear the blood of Abel that night? Even as the ground opened its mouth to receive the precious blood of Jesus, the cries of Abel could still be heard. Do you think that the centurion recognized that voice? Do you think he understood his participation in its cries?

The scene that he witnessed is hard for us to imagine. All around him was the darkness of night. Luke records that it "came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, for the sun stopped shining." The centurion felt the ground violently shake, and maybe he bore witness to the veil that was torn and the dead that were raised. But more locally, he looked upon the mangled body of Jesus that he helped hang on the cross. He saw the precious blood pour out of that body and pour into the earth. But as he stood there, he had a glimpse of something wonderful; he recognized that there was something different happening above his head.

As horrible as this scene must have been, as dark as it must have seemed, we know that that something beautiful, something incomprehensible had just been accomplished. You see, when

Abel was murdered, his blood cried out for justice and vengeance. God heard that cry and brought judgement upon Cain. But the blood of Christ - the precious blood of Christ - did not cry out for vengeance against the centurion. And it doesn't cry out for justice and vengeance against you and me. The blood of Christ cries out for mercy and grace. It pleads to God, not that justice *might* be done, but that justice *has* been done. We may not shed blood, but the sins we commit demand the same response from God as those from Cain, and the German soldiers, and Alexandria's foster mother. God demands justice. And we cannot be just. But Jesus can, and he is. And because of his death on that cross, because of his blood that was poured out, because he became our sin, he fulfilled what we could not. He satisfied God's demands for justice. There is no wrath left over for you and me, none. But what there is, is mercy and grace. What there is, is forgiveness for all of our sins.

The blood that was shed at the hands of the centurion were shed *for* the centurion. The same blood that grants mercy and grace to you and me, was made available to him. And it's made available to Alexandria's transgressor. And it's made available to the German soldiers. Abel's blood cried out for justice, but Jesus' blood cried out "*Father forgive them.*" (Luke 23:24) On that day, because of that death, the world was changed forever. We were reconciled with the father and this reconciliation is offered to *everyone*. We cry out, "Father forgive us," and because of the work of his son, he does.

Now, I started by asking if you could hear the voice of Abel's blood and I'd like to end with this. Can you also hear the voice of Christ's blood? And more than hearing, can you *feel* the proclamation of forgiveness, the assurance of mercy and grace flowing from the blood of Christ? Can you hear his blood calling out to you in forgiveness, and love, and mercy? Do you know that you are forgiven? That you are loved? This is the message of the cross and it is a message just for you. Receive it. Rest in the assurance of God's forgiveness and God's mercy and God's love... For you. He has given it all to you.

I would like to pray using modified lyrics from a Matt Redman song that we've sung in this church before. Would you pray with me?

Lord, there's a place where mercy reigns  
And never dies  
where streams of grace  
Flow deep and wide  
Where Your love ran red  
And my sin washed white

Lord, it's at the cross  
And it's there that I surrender my life to you  
I owe all to You

At the cross, is where my heart finds peace  
And forgiveness  
Where all the love I've ever found  
Comes like a flood  
Comes flowing down

Lord, it's at your cross

There my hope is found  
There on holy ground  
That's where I bow down  
That's where I bow down

And my arms, I open wide  
Because you've saved my life  
I owe all to You, Jesus  
I owe it all.

Lord, your love ran red  
And my sin washed white

I'm in awe of you.  
Here, at the cross.  
Amen