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Ash Wednesday

Matthew 27:54

When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened they were terrified and exclaimed, “Surely he was the Son of God!” (NIV 84)

Theme: Jesus is the Son of God.

As we continue to look at the names of Jesus this Lenten season we get to one of his most important names: the Son of God. It seems pretty straight forward, doesn't it? Calling Jesus the Son of God means that he is God's son and God himself. That is a basic teaching of Scripture—one that is taught in many different ways throughout the Bible. And yet, there are some who deny that Jesus is God, and they might drag us down with them.

So today we take a special look at Jesus' name, The Son of God, while focusing on his passion.

Jesus is called the Son of God more than 30 times in the New Testament. It is one of his most common names. This name alone tells us that Jesus is God. For any Son of God, must be God as well. And from the rest of Scripture we see this to be the case. We also see that the Son is not less than the Father. But they are equal. The Son, along with the Father and the Holy Spirit are one God—three persons in one God.

But not everyone believes that Jesus is God. “He is the Son of God—but not God,” they say. “He is a son of God, just like we are sons of God. Or he is greater than us, but less than God.” Others claim that Jesus wasn't God the entire time he was on earth. But he was only God when he rose from the dead, and he was a man when he died. This is just a small sample of all the false teaching out there when it comes to Christ and his divinity. And anyone who doesn't believe that Jesus is truly God isn't a Christian and will perish forever.

Why do people who know the Bible, or at least claim to know it, deny that Jesus is God? Because it doesn't make any sense. There is only one God, after all—so the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit can't all be God. It makes no sense that there are three persons in one God. And how can those three persons be equal? If Jesus is the Son and he has a Father, doesn't that mean that the Father is greater than the Son?

Holy Cross, Standish, MI.

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Or how can someone be God and man at the same time? Or how can God die? Because the divinity of Christ is contrary to our reason, people reject the truth. Because they are unable to fathom the mysteries of Christ they reject what the Bible says about him and come up with their own truth. And we may be tempted to do the same thing. For our sinful nature wants no part in something so ludicrous. Our reason wants to reject anything that isn't logical.

But the lack of logical sense isn't the only reason why people deny that Jesus is God. It is also because when they look at Jesus, they don't see God. They see a weak and feeble human being. They see someone who was born of a woman in a stable. He had to grow up and learn to walk, talk, and so on. They look at what happened to him during the week leading up to his death, and they come to the conclusion that he can't be God. For he was arrested, bound in chains, and put on trial. He was mocked, ridiculed, spit on. He had a crown of thorns stuck in his head, beaten, and flogged. Finally he was nailed to a cross, on which he eventually died. During his passion the last thing Jesus looks like is the almighty God. That suffering man, that guy up there on the cross, covered in blood, bruises, and cuts doesn't look like God. If he was God he wouldn't have put up with all of that. He wouldn't have died. And we want an impressive God—one that we can be proud to believe in and follow. And Jesus doesn't seem all that impressive—especially during Lent.

But all this didn't matter to the Centurion. He knew otherwise. He said about Jesus when he died, **Surely he was the Son of God.** But what exactly did the Centurion mean? Was he saying that Jesus was the son of a god—like the Greek and Roman pantheons? Or did he truly believe that Jesus is the son of the only true God and God himself? It is clear from what the Centurion saw and heard that he truly believed that Jesus was the Son of the one and only God and God himself. For twice the Centurion would have heard Jesus cry out to the Father while on the cross. **Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing.** So the centurion would have learned that Jesus' father can forgive sins. **Father, into your hands I commit my Spirit.** Jesus' father also decides what happens to someone when they die. The Centurion also heard Jesus tell the thief on the cross, **I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.** Jesus, just

like his Father is able to forgive sins and decides what will happen to someone when they die.

Earlier in the day the High Priest told Jesus, **Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God.** And Jesus answered, **Yes, it is as you say.** Jesus himself confessed that he was the son of God—and as we know there is only one God, therefore Jesus must also be God. But the Centurion wasn't part of the Sanhedrin and he may not have heard about Jesus' testimony earlier in the day. But he certainly heard what the people were saying about Jesus when they mocked him as he hung on the cross. **If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross.** And **Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, 'I am the Son of God.'** He would have heard Jesus tell Pilate that he was the King of the Jews, but his kingdom wasn't of this world. That means his kingdom was in heaven. Everything the Centurion heard would have lead him to believe that Jesus truly is God's son and God himself.

And this has to be the case. For if Jesus isn't God, then he isn't our Savior. Jesus lived a perfect life on this earth. And when he died on the cross he took all our sins upon himself. And he gave us his perfect life. But Jesus couldn't have done this if he isn't God. If he isn't God, his perfect life would have been good for him. He would be in heaven. But we would be on our way to hell. If he isn't God, then we are still in our sins. Then we would have no reason to be here. We would have no reason to worship and praise Jesus. For if Jesus isn't God, then he has done nothing for us.

But Jesus is God. He willingly suffered and died because he knew he is God. Then Centurion came to this conclusion as well. Not just by what he heard, but also by what he saw. In fact Matthew mentions that it is what the Centurion saw that led him to confess that Jesus was the son of God.

Jesus was nailed to the cross around 9:00 a.m.—in broad daylight. But for three hours that Friday—from noon to 3, it was dark. For new logical or scientific reason it was dark. Darkness was over the whole land when the sun was at its highest and brightest. He also saw how the sun came out again after Jesus died. Don't think this wasn't lost on the Centurion. He knew it was out of the ordinary. He also saw

how Jesus willingly gave up his life. Normally when someone died by a crucifixion it was from suffocation and exhaustion. It normally took many hours if not days for someone to die by crucifixion. More and more blood would fill their lungs and they would not be able to lift themselves up and cough it out and would eventually drown in their own blood. But Jesus didn't die like that. After only six hours Jesus cried out in a loud voice, **It is finished**—and he willingly gave up his spirit. He didn't die a normal crucifixion death at all.

And when he died there was a large earthquake. The earth shook beneath the Centurion's feet. He saw rocks split open—it couldn't have been a coincidence. Later he would have heard that dead believers came out of their graves and visited people in Jerusalem. He also would have heard how the thick curtain in the temple, that separated the people from the Holy of Holies was split in two—from top to bottom. So it was clear to the centurion that Jesus was God. And he was gripped with fear that he had killed God's Son.

Jesus' name the Son of God, clearly means that he is God. Each year in Confirmation class, while talking about the second article of the Apostle's Creed, we list four main reasons why Jesus is God. 1. He has divine names. The Bible calls him the Son of God, Lord, Savior, and so on. 2. He has divine Characteristics. He is eternal, all-knowing, all-powerful, and present everywhere. 3. He does divine works. He does things only God can do by performing miracles—turning water into wine, healing diseases, or raising people from the dead. 4. He has divine honor. When he honor the Son we honor the Father, and vice versa. And Jesus commands that all people—even angels worship him.

We could say many thing about these points, but we'll focus on the first one. Jesus has divine names. And Jesus isn't just called the Son of God; he is also called God. In the prologue to his gospel, John is talking about Jesus, in Incarnate Word. He said, **In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.** The week after Easter when Jesus appeared to his disciples, and specifically to Thomas, Thomas said to Jesus, **My Lord and my God.** And Jesus didn't correct him like you would expect him to if he wasn't God. John says in his first letter that Jesus Christ **is the True God and eternal life.** Paul says, **Christ...is God over all, forever**

praised! It is clear from all of Scripture that Jesus isn't just the Son of God. He is God.

So calling Jesus the Son of God is the same as calling him God. And that is what the Centurion confessed. And we should confess the same thing. But there are many times that we do not. Instead we often keep our confessions to ourselves. We let people believe in falsehoods and keep the truth away from them. At times, we let anyone believe what they want to believe about Christ and his divinity. "What they believe is up to them," we say, "who am I to tell them otherwise?" But whoever does not believe that Jesus is God will not be saved. And we want all people to join us in heaven forever. So we spread the gospel—that Jesus is true God and our Savior.

Like the Centurion we confess what we know to be true. He said, **Truly, he was the Son of God. Was,** said the Centurion. We would make one correction. Jesus is the Son of God. For although he died, he proved that he is eternal. He rose from the dead and proved that he is our God and Savior. Because he is God he was able to take our place on the cross and suffer through hell so we wouldn't have to. Because he is God he was able to rise from the dead. Because he is God we will rise from the dead as Jesus takes us to live with him in heaven forever.

Despite what some people claim, when Jesus is called the Son of god, it is straight forward. He is the Son of the one and only God, and he is God himself. Out of all the names of Jesus, this is perhaps his most important. For if Jesus isn't God then he isn't our Lord, our Savior, or our Redeemer. But Jesus is God. He willingly suffered and died for us because he knew who he was. He knew that through his suffering, death, and resurrection he would pay for our sins and lead us to his heavenly home. Amen.