

7/19/15- Pastor Wes Johnson

What if the worst thing that ever happen to you, could be the best thing that ever happened to you? My life collided with Jesus when...?

We are going to meet a man today who was on the front row during the final few hours of Jesus life. We don't know a lot about this man, his personal life as far as his family goes. But we do know what he did for a living, which is how we meet him, and it also tells us some things about him.

He was a Roman Centurion, and as a Roman Centurion it meant that he had been a soldier most of his adult life. And he had worked his way up the ranks to the point where he now oversaw and was the commander of 100 men.

Just because of the nature of his job we know that he had watched men die, and had taken lives. Hundreds if not thousands over his military career.

We know this that on the day that we meet him it is just another day of work. Just a job, he was given his next assignment, not unlike other assignments that he had been given before.

To beat, torture and kill a Jewish agitator.

This is what they did every day. Eventually your heart can become calloused to anything and so they had made this a bit of a game. They would mock Jesus. I don't know if it was his idea or one of his men but they take a branch of thorns and they fashion a crown and drive it onto the head of Jesus.

My point is if there was ever a man that it was too late for, if there was ever a person that was too calloused, too jaded or cynical, seen to much, done to much...it was this guy.

I want to give you a couple of reasons why this Centurion would have had a difficult time being open to Jesus.

Maybe we can relate to some of these.

a. Background

He wasn't Jewish he was Roman. So he didn't grow up hearing about the Messiah, he wasn't taught the prophesies as a child, he didn't celebrate things like the Passover.

It just isn't how he grew up.

Even if Jesus was something to the Jewish people he wasn't anything to him. It wasn't his tradition, it wasn't his beliefs.

Maybe this morning you are here and this may just be where you are at. You're just not sure about all of this. You didn't grow up in church, you don't have those traditions in your life, you're here because you recognize that there are some things that aren't going the way that you had hoped in your life and you are looking for something more.

Maybe Easter/Christmas but that is about it.

b. Prejudice.

He likely, being a Roman had a very deep-rooted prejudice towards the Jewish people. The Roman people felt like they were a better people and they saw the Jewish people of the time as inferior, and less than. Prejudice and all that comes with it.

You see having personal issue with God's people can make it difficult to come to God.

Maybe it was your family member who was just always pushing you, or a gossiping friend, arrogant boss or a judgmental sibling or a narrow-minded neighbor. You don't want to be like them so you turned away but you also turned away from Jesus at the same time.

c. Familiarity.

He had seen this and done this, crucifixion and beating, so many times before. You get the sense that they had figured out a way to have fun with it, make a game out of it.

It was a nasty business but he had become accustomed to it, just taking orders and doing his job. He had heard the cries of those he had crucified and their family's, he knew what to expect. They had fun with it. They gambled at the foot of the cross for the one piece of clothing that Jesus had. Jesus is dying and they are playing games.

It's not that you don't care it is just that you have heard all of this before. I know the story, I know what happens and we can become apathetic to it and we have a game on our mind.

A lot of things have our attention. Work, home, family, kids, there always seems to be some type of emergency. It is not that we don't care there is just a lot of other important stuff right now going on in my life.

Here, Jesus is on the cross and He prays. And I am sure that the Centurion had probably heard lots of prayers from the cross.

People crying out for help, people calling down wrath from heaven, calling on God to avenge them....

Jesus clear His throat to pray and He says, 'Father forgive them'

He could have called down 72,000 angels ready to defend and protect Him. He could have called the wrath of heaven, fire of heaven down on them and instead He calls for God's Grace. I think that was the moment, it had to be it.

What do you do with that kind of Love and that kind of Grace?

What else can you do but be changed by it?

Isaiah 53:5: *But he was pierced for our rebellion, crushed for our sins. He was beaten so we could be whole. He was whipped so we could be healed.*

Maybe like the centurion people have disappointed you. A Christian or a church hurt you.

I want to say that I am sorry if that is your story. But don't look away from Jesus because of us. Maybe like the centurion you discover that you have become a little apathetic to some of these things. You have heard them all before. It's nothing new. Maybe you don't have much of a God background. You didn't grow up in church so it kind of feels like a club that you don't belong to.

I just want to be clear about one thing...Jesus died for you.

And that can change everything.