

# The Cross

*Last 24 Hours of Christ*

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**Bible Text:** Matthew 27:33-37  
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I don't know if you know this, but if we wanted to be really biblical this morning, in Nehemiah 9 there's a nine hour worship service that they stood for the entire service. So I'm not going to do that to us this morning but just to let you know what we just sang may not be far off what heaven's going to be like.

That being said, Matthew 27. If you are a guest or visitor with us this morning, this is not just an accidental, coincidental, arbitrary passage, in fact, one of the things we're doing in the season of our family of faith's life is we're not walking through one of the respective gospels, we're not going through the entirety of Jesus' life and ministry, we're basically focusing on those 24 hours that the gospels spend the most time on, the 24 hours leading up to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. It begins with what we know as the Last Supper. It quickly makes its way to the garden of Gethsemane. Judas betrays him. There is a trial where Peter denies him. But today we find ourselves at this kind of unique spot in the story, the cross. Now I know there's a lot of events that take place on the cross, next week we're going to deal with the two thieves and their conversation with Jesus, we're going to talk about the darkness, the veil being torn in two, but today we're not really looking at all of the aspects of the cross as much as we are what did the cross mean? Why is it so significant? And more than just fact versus fiction of 2,000 years ago, how does it impact our lives today?

Again, when we get to these last 24 hours of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, all four gospels give us a very clear picture of what's happening, but today I want to encourage you to turn to Matthew 27 beginning in verse 33. There are several statements that are made here that we're going to kind of need to kind of peel away the layers of because they're so rich to give us the full impact therein. Beginning in verse 33 it says,

33 And when they were come unto a place called Golgotha, that is to say, a place of a skull, 34 They gave him vinegar to drink mingled with gall: and when he had tasted thereof, he would not drink. 35 And they crucified him, and parted his garments, casting lots: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture did they cast lots. 36 And sitting down they watched him

there; 37 And set up over his head his accusation written, THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS.

Now for an event that is not only the central aspect of the Christian faith but that which changed the entirety of the world system, a very kind of just simplistic account of what took place, but as we've studied the last few weeks, I want to walk through this very simple passage addressing some important strategic questions to hopefully give us some insight to what really is taking place on this place known as Golgotha or Mount Calvary.

Let's begin with the "when." Now each and every time we've gathered recently, we really connect the dots, which event leads to the other events, and we know that chronologically Simon of Cyrene was last week's study, next week we'll deal with the two thieves, but I want to kind of take a bigger picture of that and one of the things that I want to address this morning is the importance of timing, the "when" here. Just a few hours ago this morning, I had a distinct once a year privilege. I was invited back and hopefully I'll get invited back again, you know, that's one of the tests of when you're a public speaker or preacher is if they bring you back again. But I had the opportunity to address the Auburn University baseball team. This was their weekly Sunday morning chapel service that they have for home series and the thing that I addressed with them was the importance of timing. You know, on the athletic field and even in business, it doesn't matter what your skill set is, it doesn't matter what your prowess is, it doesn't even matter how passionate or aggressive you are, if the timing is off there's not going to be any success. There are a lot of people in the athletic world that achieved great success with less than stellar physical compositions because they had impeccable timing. There's a lot of incredible athletes that never quite made it because they couldn't quite get the timing right.

Timing is everything. You may or may not be aware of this but Jesus Christ when crucified, as we read, this was not just some arbitrary day. This was not just it happened to land on this day of a certain count. In fact, one of the things we discover in the Old Testament is both what we know as the Christmas story and his birth and the Easter story, his death, burial and resurrection, both were very strategic in when they took place. The book of Daniel 9, we have this incredible prophecy about the birth of Jesus Christ and it's stated that in excess of 173,000 days from now the Messiah will be born. Now that is quite a feat. The Bible 500 years before what we know as the Christmas story, didn't just tell us the decade but according to the prophet Daniel the actual day that the Messiah would come in flesh.

You see, the Lord is very interested in timing and we see the same thing here because when Jesus Christ is placed on the cross, it's not just about the respective day or the week but it really is about the calendar. In fact, 1,500 years previous the book of Exodus 12, the Israelites after 400 years of bondage, 400 years of captivity, they're finally going to be released from Egypt. They're going to do something that nobody knew anybody who had ever experienced in their life, they're going to walk in freedom, and the night before they would do so, the Lord instituted the Passover meal. Now it's a very interesting meal in a lot of different facets. 1. There was to be no leaven present, representative of sin being absent from the equation. The Lord told them to eat while standing up and have your

shoes on because as soon as he commissioned them, they were to get out of Dodge, so to speak.

That being said, that meal that night and Passover meal each subsequent year since is the same meal, lamb is served. It's a Passover lamb. And what's interesting in Exodus 12 it says that that Passover lamb was to be killed not when convenient, not when they thought it was a good time, but when God said to. And did you know that the Bible tells us in Exodus 12 that the Passover lamb was to be killed on the 14<sup>th</sup> of Nisan. By the way, that's the first month of the Jewish calendar. Why is that significant? Because when John the Baptist came baptizing in the river Jordan, what did he do when he pointed to Jesus? He said, "Behold, the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world." And you don't even have to go and do the research, I'll let you guess what day of the calendar Jesus Christ was crucified? The 14<sup>th</sup> of Nisan. It was Passover and the Lamb of all lambs was crucified.

So here when it says "and they crucified him," it wasn't just at a certain day, at a certain time, this was THE day that it had to take place. How about the "who"? Well, we know obviously that Jesus Christ, he's the central figure not just of this story but all stories, but there's two other groups that are present here that I want to speak of. One is not mentioned in the gospel of Matthew and one is. The one that's not mentioned is the group that I like to call "The Five." You say, "The Five?" We actually find this referenced in John 19. In John 19:25 it says that at the foot of the cross whom we know as the Apostle John and four ladies were present. You say, "Why is that significant?" Because just a few days earlier what we celebrate as Palm Sunday, the Bible says there were tens of thousands of people who shouted, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" They were shouting. They were putting palms in the way. They were creating such a ruckus that those Jewish authorities asked him to silence them. Isn't it interesting that when it appears that you're "walking in victory," when you're coming through the Eastern Gate, when you're coming on the Temple Mount, tens of thousands shout that you are "the guy," but when you're hanging on a cross, there's only five that are there. Simon Peter, gone. Judas, hung himself. Bartholomew, nowhere to be found. And tens of thousands of other names that we could mention. Of all the people that Jesus healed, of all the people that Jesus fed, of all the people that heard Jesus preach, only five of them were at the cross when he was crucified.

Then there is the proverbial day. You know, in today's world we always speak of, "Well, you know, they say," but I can actually show you biblically this was a proper terminology. Look in verse 36, it says, "And sitting down they watched him there." Well, who are the "they"? Well, there's actually two groups of people that would have been present at Jesus' crucifixion in addition to the five faithful ones at the foot of the cross. One group were those Jewish officials who initiated this whole process by claiming at Caiaphas' house that he was guilty of blasphemy. These were the men, the power-brokers of the day that were threatened by Jesus in so many different ways. These were the men who saw him heal on the Sabbath. These were the men who saw him multiply food. These were the men who are pricked at the heart when he told them, "You are whitewashed sepulchres. You are pretty on the outside but you are rotten and dead on the

inside." Why were they there? Why were they watching with such anticipation? Because they were hoping that their plan would come to fruition. These were the same men who a few days later made a vow, "We will not eat or drink until he breathes his last breath." You see, they knew he could walk on water. They knew he could multiply food. And they knew if he wanted to, he could come off that cross. They had to watch and make sure.

Then there's the Roman mercenaries. We talked about them last week with Simon of Cyrene. These were the individuals that actually got compensated to inflict pain. Their job whether it was Jesus Christ or anybody else, was one simple task, to make sure that this experience was the most painful as humanly possible. That was their goal.

So the scene has been set but, you know, it may be where it took place that could be the most intriguing. Now I know that the Bible says here in verse 33 that it was on Golgotha. Three of your gospels say Golgotha, the gospel of Luke says Calvary, the place of the skull. As mentioned last week, it would have been maybe a 15 minute gingerly walk from Pilate's palace to what we know as Golgotha, and if you ever have the privilege of being in this part or that part of the world, particularly the western side of the Temple Mount, you don't have to question where Jesus was crucified. How is it described? The place of the skull. And even though today there have been groups that have tried to desecrate the site, and even though today there is a very busy bus stop right in front of this famous site, if you step back it's not hard to find it because it looks like a skull.

But more importantly than the fact that we know the location, more importantly its proximity to Pilate, I want you to see something fascinating in verse 36. It says, "And sitting down they watched him." Now does that strike you as odd? I mean, they're tailgating at a crucifixion is what they're doing. They have brought their lawn chairs to watch this. Now why is that so significant other than the fact the Jews had to make sure he died and the Romans had to make sure they got paid and compensated, why is that significant? We talked about it last week, that in the city of Jerusalem on Passover in particular on the 14<sup>th</sup> of Nisan, this road would have been the busiest street in all of the world. Tens of thousands of people and what does it say? They sat down. It doesn't say while thousands were walking by they gazed at him. It says they took a seat.

Now let me picture this for you in our world today. It doesn't matter where the scenario takes place but just imagine for the sake of illustration, not that you've ever experienced this, but you're on Interstate 85 going north and/or south, and somebody just decides to stop in the middle of the Interstate. Just stop. What's going to happen? Traffic is going to get blocked up for miles. I mean, there are times that we've had congestion on the interstate and there wasn't even a wreck, just because somebody saw a deer or something, they slowed down, the next car slowed down, the next thing you know you've got that big red line on your Google maps, right? Think about this. Think about if on Interstate 85 today a group of people in cars stopped in the middle, got out and sat down.

You say, "Why is that significant?" Because the scene of the crucifixion would have looked like a modern-day college football game. The number of people that got

bottlenecked in that street, the number of people, they had to get to Jerusalem. This is the 14<sup>th</sup> of Nisan and it says in verse 36, "And sitting down." What we see here is not just the event that makes our faith valid, what we see here is not just that event that changed the world forever, but for one brief moment all of humanity that was there stopped what they were doing and watched, looked and listened to a man who was hanging on a cross.

So what happened? What actually took place on Golgotha? What actually took place of Jesus' crucifixion? The first thing I want to share with you is a very particular event not just in Jesus' life but anybody who was placed upon a cross, and this is critical not only for our understanding today but in days ahead. When somebody as cruel as it is, when somebody was placed on a cross – please hear me clearly – that being affixed to the cross with your feet and hands is not what killed you. That's not what did it. In fact, what took place during a crucifixion no matter who was being crucified is that one's body weight would be suspended in such a manner that in order to take a breath, or particularly in Jesus' case to utter statements, you had to take your body weight and you had to lift up to fill your lungs to then say what you needed to say or just to simply get a breath. Now do you understand why Jesus only made seven very simple strategic statements? Every breath would have been laborious. Every statement would have been difficult at best.

Now I want you to imagine some of you today are athletic, so to speak, and I want you to imagine just your own body weight. Let me put this in modern terminology. You're going to go to the gym and you're going to go to the squat rack, okay, where you're going to exercise your legs, and you're not going to put any weight on the bar. It's just going to be the bar, that's it, your body weight. And I'm going to ask you one time every 60 seconds to do a squat just with the bar. Now for many of you in the room, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10 minutes could pass and you'd begin to think this was a joke, but let four hours pass and let's see how you're doing. When your muscles are forced to contract and extend once every 60 seconds without fail, because if you stop you can't breathe, if you stop you don't have the capacity to continue, so you have to extend.

Now do you understand why some individuals, it took days for them to die because they were in good shape, they were athletic, they could withstand it, but even the thieves, we'll study this next week, because the Sabbath was looming, they broke their legs. Why did they break their legs? Because that kept them from pushing up. When we look at what was taking place on the cross, we discover that this was not a normal means of death, it was a rigorous, painful, vile way that somebody would "spend their last moments."

The cross was a very particular means of death but also I want you to see the picture of the cross. We talked about the physicalness, we talked about his feet on the cross, his hands on the cross, extending himself with every breath and every statement, but you know, most individuals were able to go for some length of time because that really was the "beginning of the end." But not the case with Jesus. In fact, in Isaiah 52 it says that when Jesus Christ was on the cross, that he was marred more than any other human. You know, the Bible speaks about the fact that Pilate had him beaten and whipped, and we like to go to the Old Testament and say, "Oh, but the Jews could only beat him 39 times," as if that's not enough. But you know it wasn't the Jews that beat him, right? It was the

Romans. They could have beat him 80 times if they wanted to without fear of retribution. The Bible says he was hardly recognizable and that was before he even got to the cross. You see, most men when they were put on the cross, they were in there popping their knuckles, stretching, getting ready to see how long they could go. Jesus Christ was placed on a cross and according to the Bible was completely disfigured at best.

That's the physical side but do you know one of the things I've learned the older I get? Sometimes heart hurt is worse than body hurt. You know, there's an old joke that the older you get, if it doesn't hurt, it's not working, right, true? But you know about your heart. You see, when your heart's broken, it hurts worse than anything on your body that is. Think about the scene. Thousands of people that Jesus Christ ministered to. Untold numbers that he healed and delivered. Five of them at the cross.

You know, one of the interesting things about athletic competition is the exhaustion that takes place in a game or a match, whichever respective sport. I know we're at the basketball season currently but whatever sport it is of your choice, one of the things that we've discovered is that as you get closer to the buzzer, as you get closer to the end, exhaustion sets in and typically it's who's got the fortitude, correct? These guys are worn out. The coaches, I mean, they're yelling, "Just one more play, one more, you can do this!" Have you ever noticed something? Have you ever noticed that whoever wins the game always is laughing and smiling at the post-game interview? All of a sudden they've got all this energy. But what about the ones who lost? Have you ever seen when a young person goes to play a sporting event or maybe goes to do a concert, do you know what's the first thing, and we see it here on these steps, when we have the children's choir sing, what's the first thing a kid does? Looks for mom and dad, right? In fact, some of you have been the beneficiary that you've been embarrassed by it, in the middle when they're supposed to be singing, they're going, "Hi," and they're doing all that, right? Because those who they care and love the most is who they want present when they're there.

Can you imagine the heart hurt? Some of you have experienced this. There's a significant event in your life, you're hoping somebody will show and they don't. It doesn't matter how good the food is, does it? It doesn't matter how many people technically showed. If the ones you care about aren't there, it hurts. Can you imagine the heart hurt that Jesus would have had on the cross? You see, it's not just the physical, though that is horrific, it's the emotional, it's the mental, and it's also very prophetic. Now I know the cross is a fulfillment of prophecy but let me go forward just a moment. Did you know that in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ we have 48 specific prophecies in the Old Testament? I'm going to do some Old Testament math for you in just a moment, okay? Now I didn't say 48 verses, I say 48 events, okay? Oftentimes multiple prophets, multiple passages about a single solitary event. Did you know that in Psalm 22, eight of those 48 events are mentioned in one single chapter?

Now for the sake of time, we're not going to turn to Psalm 22 this morning. We're going to deal with it in a few weeks because it begins with one of those seven statements that Jesus makes from the cross when he says, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" It talks about the dogs gathering, gambling for his clothes, his feet being pierced,

his hands being pierced. What we know as the visual of the cross is laid out in Psalm 22 and let me encourage you at some point read it, study it, look through it. But can I share with you how it ends? It's really interesting. Psalm 22 which is about crucifixion, about pain, agony, heartache physically and emotional, do you know how it ends? It says, "And all the inhabitants of the earth shall declare that he is the king unto them." One of the things we don't realize is Psalm 22 which, by the way, contains 12% of all the prophecies of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ does not end in agony or defeat, it ends in victory.

So when we talk about the cross as vile as it was physically, as difficult as it was emotionally, it is prophetic that this is the only way and the only means by which victory could take place in our lives. In Hebrews 12:1-2 it talks about the great cloud of witnesses that are around us, it talks about the sins that beset us and the weights that hinder us. He says, "Look unto Jesus, the author, the finisher of our faith," listen to this, "for the joy that was set before him endured the cross." Yes, it was horrific. Yes, it was difficult, but he knew that the only way sin could have victory over, the only way death could experience victory is if he went through and accomplished what he did.

Now the big question is why? Why is this so critical for you and I? Why is this so important for us? Can I talk about the particularness of the cross real briefly? I want you to hear me very very sincerely. I'm not here to tell you to change your "dress code." I'm not here to tell you to change the décor of your house. But you and I today have, shall we say, glamorized and sterilized the cross. Let me give you an illustration. How would it go over if you had a dinner party at your house this week and you invited your guests into your home for a meal, and as they sat down there was a framed oil painting 4x3' in size on the wall of an electric chair? How do you think that would go over? Not real well, would it? You do realize that the cross was the first century electric chair, and I understand it's the symbol of the faith, I understand it's the easiest way to non-verbally communicate what we believe, however, one of the struggles is we've sterilized, we've glamorized, we've popularized that which was the means of death in the ancient world.

Then there's the picture, the picture not only of the physical pain and the emotional pain but let me quote for us probably the most famous verse in the New Testament, John 3:16, "For God so loved." For God so loved. You see, the cross, though as cruel as it is, is actually the best picture we've got of how much God loves us. "For God so loved the world," you know what the next phrase is, "that he gave his only begotten Son." Have you noticed John 3:16, Jesus worded it so he did not say – hear me – he did not say, "For God so loved the world he sent his only begotten Son." He said, "For God so loved the world he gave." Do you know what he's talking about? The cross. The sacrifice. It is the best picture that we have of what true love really looks like. In fact, Jesus said hardly a righteous man will ever exchange his life for another, therefore lay down your lives for each other. That was his challenge and he modeled it for us. For God so loved us. What a picture that his love of us and for us was his sacrifice on behalf of us.

Then it's prophetic. Back to Psalm 22 for a moment. If there's one thing I've learned in my own life and humanity's life, is that we are always striving for but rarely attaining victory. I want to give you just an observation. I know I like sports for a lot of different

reasons but I think one of the things that sports does for us is it teaches us things on the court or on the field that the classroom and other things can't do. There's a reason the Apostle Paul used illustrations like running the race or fighting the fight. There's a reason we do this. I want you to think about this for just a moment as I close. Rarely ever does a player or a coach win their last game. Have you ever thought about that? One of the most successful collegiate basketball coaches of all time is wrapping up his final season right now, lost his last home game, lost his last conference championship game, and probably will not win the national championship, and yet he'll go down in history as one of the most successful ever. You see, isn't that interesting, we spend our whole lives training and striving and rarely if ever, even on the athletic field, do we see victory in the last game we play.

When's the last time your striving in life actually brought you victory? Rarely does it. We attain more education only to receive more disappointment. We attain more means of ease and we achieve more despair. And what the cross does is it shows us not only his love for us and what he was willing to do on our behalf but it shows us very clearly prophetically that this is the only way that you're ever going to have victory. This is the only way in life here and in the next that you're ever going to experience that which alludes you every day that you wake up. We strive for victory. We strive and what do we sense? Despair and despondency all the time. You see, the cross is prophetic in our lives because God so loved you and loved me that he gave himself so that whosoever believeth should not perish but have everlasting life.

Isn't it interesting that according to scripture the only way to truly experience victory is to have somebody else play on your behalf? There are thousands of people who died upon a cross but only one whose death can bring us victory. There are thousands of people who did their best to somehow overcome the strain and the struggle of the cross but only one was able to say, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." The cross was a vile, violent experience that was done out of love so that you and I wouldn't have to strive for victory anymore, we could experience it through belief.

Let's pray with our heads bowed and our eyes closed. Maybe this morning whether in person, online or the radio, maybe you're that individual that today the Spirit of God through the word of God got ahold of your heart and maybe today that which you're desiring and longing for so much, forgiveness and peace and all those things that allude us each and every day, maybe today you realize that it's only going to come through the person of Jesus Christ. The Bible says whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved, not whoever becomes religious, it doesn't say whoever jumps through a hoop, whoever passes a test. It says whoever believes, whoever trusts. Maybe that's you this morning. Let me encourage you just to do what Romans 10 says, just to call on the name of the Lord. It's not about a certain phrase or a set of words in the proper order. It's about your heart's cry and maybe today your heart's cry would go something like this. "God, I know I've sinned and, God, I know I have violated your word. God, I know I've done things I shouldn't have done, said things I shouldn't have said. God, that's not the problem I have. The problem is I've been trying to fix it myself. The problem is I've tried to attain my own righteousness. God, today I believe that Jesus Christ has accomplished by



himself everything that I've tried to do on my own. So God, today I want you to know I believe, I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much that he came on my behalf. God, I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much he lived a sinless life on my behalf. And God, today, I believe that that picture of what he did on the cross, the blood that poured down, the agony, the pain, the mockery he willingly did that to take the price and the punishment of my sin. And God, today I believe that three days later he rose from the grave so I could be forgiven, I could be saved. God, today with all that's happening in the world, I don't have the answers, I don't have the solutions, I don't know how all that stuff is going to work out, but there's one thing I know for sure is that the only way my sin problem is going to be solved is through the shed blood and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. So the best way I know how, I'm asking you to forgive me, I'm asking you to save me. I just want to turn my life over to you."

With our heads still bowed and our eyes still closed, maybe you're that person today who had that conversation with the Lord in your own words. In a moment, I'm going to pray for us and we're going to stand and sing together. I just want to invite you just to step out and step forward. Maybe you're that person today who had that conversation for the first time or maybe you say, "You know what? I'm already saved, already had that conversation with the Lord, but like that young lady, I need to be baptized biblically." Let me invite you to do the same. We'd love to talk about it. Or maybe you're one of those folks saying, "You know what? Got that taken care of but this is where the Lord has me in my church." And we would love the privilege in a moment. We have a team set aside, we have a room set aside, we'd love the opportunity. But maybe today you say, you know, it's not about stepping out and stepping forward, maybe today is about stepping off the property in a moment realizing how significant Jesus Christ's love is, was, and always will be for you, what he was willing to do on your behalf and mine so we could be forgiven and saved.

*Lord Jesus, as we come to this time of decision, God, there are not enough words in our language or any other language to show you the gratitude and the thanks for what you did on our behalf. God, very simply we just need to follow your leading, your direction, and how you're moving us this hour. God, may we simply follow you in whatever decision you place on our heart. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.*