
He was Crucified

Matthew 27:24-56

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Introduction (v.24-26)

²⁴ So when Pilate saw that he was gaining nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves." ²⁵ And all the people answered, "His blood be on us and on our children!" ²⁶ Then he released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, delivered him to be crucified.

The picture of the world is here:

One who condemns but claims to be innocent.

Those who accept responsibility but go on to destruction.

The one who goes to His sacrificial, saving death.

By being Mocked (v.27-44)

Matthew draws us into seeing and even experiencing the mocking, the scorn, that Jesus endured.

With a Whipping (v.27-31)

²⁷ Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor's headquarters, and they gathered the whole battalion before him. ²⁸ And they stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, ²⁹ and twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on his head and put a reed in his right hand. And kneeling before him, they mocked him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" ³⁰ And they spit on him and took the reed and struck him on the head. ³¹ And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes on him and led him away to crucify him.

The whole battalion of 60 – 100 men was gathered to be the "army" of the "king". He was stripped of His own clothes, clothed in a scarlet robe of royalty. A crown of Palestinian thorns, usually 3-8 inches long, was pressed onto Jesus' head. They gave him a limp scepter of a reed and then bowed and hailed Him. Their hatred for the Jews was evident. This, this is what they thought of the King of the Jews. Little did they know...

Jesus was spit on and then hit around the head with the reed. All of this was a cruel game to make fun of Jesus and to mock His claim to be the Messiah. One writer says, "A macabre game was played occasionally in the ancient world. At the spring festival they would dress up a prisoner as a king, pay him mock allegiance, grant all his last wishes for a night – and then scourge and kill him. It seems that they played 'the king's game' with Jesus. In Plutarch,²³ we read of pirates mocking a man who says he is a Roman, stripping him, scourging him, and killing him. That is what the soldiery did with Jesus. There were precedents for their behaviour." (Green, p.294)

With a Substitute (v.32)

³² As they went out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name. They compelled this man to carry his cross.

Is this a mockery? Yes. It is making fun of the weakness of Jesus. It is lowering Him to need and receive the help of a foreigner. Jesus is supposed to be this mighty king, but He cannot even carry His own cross. He is not strong. He is weak. Why would anyone want to follow Him?

Yes, Jesus has been up all night and it is now moving toward mid-morning. He has been whipped and beaten. Can He drag His cross along the road? Probably not. But now, someone else must carry His cross for Him. Since Matthew knows the name and home of this man it is likely he became a believer.

With a Narcotic (v.33-34)

³³ And when they came to a place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull), ³⁴ they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall, but when he tasted it, he would not drink it.

While we may not know exactly where this place was, we must not miss Matthew's point. They are going to crucify the Lord at the place called "Skull Place". It is a popular notion that Jesus was crucified on a hill. That may be. It was the tendency of the Romans to crucify in an elevated, public place where they would be on display. Matthew is not concerned to identify the location. All of this sentimentalism around where Jesus walked and where Jesus died with monuments and memorials is totally alien to the spirit of the New Testament. It is the *name* of the place, not the location that Matthew means for us to stop and think about. While this may be a place of death, it is not a place where Jesus' long dead skull will lie.

Wine is offered. But it has been mixed with gall which would have deadened the pain. This was often done to lessen the screams of those being crucified. It was not a mercy to the criminal but to the soldiers who had to endure what they were ordered to do. Jesus recognizes what it was and refuses it.

Matthew has shown us three cups in these last hours of Jesus life. There is cup of the Lord's Table and remembering His death. There is cup of suffering and submitting to the Father's will. There is the cup of wine refused and the full awareness of the pain embraced. This is the way of the cross. In community with God's people, the cup of remembrance. Under our Father's sovereign hand submitting to His will. Rejecting the ease and comforts offered that would take us away from true discipleship.

With His Clothes (v.35-36)

³⁵ And when they had crucified him, they divided his garments among them by casting lots. ³⁶ Then they sat down and kept watch over him there.

So much in a short phrase. "They crucified Jesus." Everyone in Matthew's world would have known what that involved. Being tied or nailed to either an X (as Peter was) or to the cross we are familiar with. Jesus was nailed to the cross as evidenced by what He showed the disciples and asked Thomas to touch. Arms spread out, feet nailed to piece of wood nailed to the upright of the cross. That way the crucified could push themselves up in order to breathe. They were crucified, naked. Almost all the paintings and pictures are wrong. The painters are giving the scene a modesty it does not have. Jesus stripped of His clothes, laid on the cross of wood,

naked. The cross was stood up into the hole dug to hold it. Stones or wood was driven into the hole to steady the cross. Every breath meant pushing up with the legs to relax the diaphragm so He could breathe. Bleeding, dehydrated, racked with pain, bared for all to see... because of our sin and sins.

Matthew again shows us another mocking of Jesus. The soldiers crucifying Jesus took His clothes and rolled the dice for the pieces. Yes, His clothes may have had value. But to the soldiers, this was another act of cruelty. All of those standing around would see Jesus' clothes divided up as hung there, unclothed.

What callous disregard for suffering. The soldiers sit down near the cross and watch. They have been the instruments of His crucifixion. Now they are spectators, lounging in the grass, rolling their dice for His clothes.

With a Banner (v.37)

³⁷ And over his head they put the charge against him, which read, "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews."

Ah, they mocked His Kingship. Yes. He is the true King of the Jews. But He is also so much more. He is King of universe. The sign hangs there for all to see. The King is dead...

With the Robbers (v.38)

³⁸ Then two robbers were crucified with him, one on the right and one on the left.

The Romans mock Jesus by crucifying two other criminals alongside of Jesus. Jesus is in the center. But clearly they mean to convey that Jesus is no better than two other common criminals.

By the Crowd (v.39-40)

³⁹ And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads ⁴⁰ and saying, "You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross."

This crowd was knowledgeable of what Jesus had said. This is probably the same crowd in the courtyard of Caiaphas and were familiar with the testimony against the Lord. Their jeering words are exactly what is happening. The bodily temple of Jesus is being destroyed in death. But Sunday is coming...

By the Leaders (v.41-43)

⁴¹ So also the chief priests, with the scribes and elders, mocked him, saying, ⁴² "He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. ⁴³ He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him. For he said, 'I am the Son of God.' "

The religious leaders who have attacked and argued with Jesus know what He has claimed. He is supposed to be the king. He is supposed to be the Son of God. Yet here He is hanging on the cross. If He is who He says He is then prove it by coming down from the cross. But being on the cross was His ultimate mission. This is what the elders and the scribes and the Pharisees could not understand. The kingdom is not coming with demonstrations of great physical power to overcome Rome. The kingdom is coming through the cross, through the sacrificial

sacrifice of the Messiah. The message and meaning of the cross is spread by sacrificial disciples.

By the Robbers (v.44)

⁴⁴ And the robbers who were crucified with him also reviled him in the same way.

Even the robbers get in the act. They mock Jesus with the same words in the same way.

By being Put to Death (v.45-50)

Here is both a high mountain and the lowest valley of Matthew's gospel.

Its Time (v.45)

⁴⁵ Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour.

This is from noon until 3:00PM as we count a day. This was the time when the Passover sacrifices were being killed. Darkness descends over all of Israel in those hours. This was a supernatural hiding of the sun. This was a curtain over the horrors of the cross. The light of the world would be snuffed out in death. The world in darkness would be even deeper into the blackness.

Its Cry (v.46)

⁴⁶ And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

At this moment, this cry is wrung from the heart and lips of Jesus. It is not only the words of His anguish, but it is also Psalm 22. This is the true suffering of the cross. We cannot fathom what this actually means. But it tells us that the cup that Jesus anticipated and rightly dreaded, was being drunk. The wrath of the Father because of the sins of the elect was being poured out on Jesus. HE is experiencing spiritually what the eternal punishment in hell will be. Because Jesus in His deity is eternal and infinite, He can suffer, even in an instant, the unending eternal punishment you and I deserve.

Jesus did not go to the cross because of His own sin or evil deeds. All through the book of Matthew and ever in increasing intensity, the innocence of Jesus has been attested to. Yet, here He is, forsaken by the Father. What does this mean? It means everything the Old Testament foreshadowed it to be. It means everything the New Testament interprets it to mean.

Never forget that this is for our salvation, that Christ died for God.

Its Misunderstanding (v.47-49)

⁴⁷ And some of the bystanders, hearing it, said, "This man is calling Elijah." ⁴⁸ And one of them at once ran and took a sponge, filled it with sour wine, and put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink. ⁴⁹ But the others said, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him."

Unbelieving bystanders hear the words of Jesus. They misunderstand what He is saying. Some think Jesus is calling on Elijah to rescue Him. Others get a sponge to once again offer Him the sour wine to drink. Some cynically want to wait to see if some miraculous appearance and deliverance by Elijah is going to happen.

I asked myself, "Why did Matthew record this?" It struck me that this is a warning to his readers and to us. It is easy to misunderstand what is going on here. Unbelief, no matter how religious it may be, will not understand the cross. Even those who were there seeing the crucifixion of Jesus in person did not understand what was happening.

The only way to understand the cross? To believe the Scriptures in what they say. Once you accept that the Scriptures are true and bow to Jesus as Lord, then you will begin to understand.

Its Ending (v.50)

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

Here is the final cry from the cross. Matthew chose not to tell us what He said. It is important to other gospel writers. Matthew is simply bringing the crucifixion to an end. Jesus cries out. Jesus yields up His spirit. Jesus dismisses His spirit. No one killed Jesus. No one took His life. He freely gave it up.

With Powerful Effects (v.51-56)

In the darkness, in the moment of His death, powerful and mysterious things happened.

In the Temple (v.51)

⁵¹ And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split.

The rocks splitting here is probably referring to an earthquake. Other gospel writers refer to it. Matthew speaks of it this way.

What Matthew wants us to focus on is another dramatic event. In the Temple, between the inner room called the Holy of Holies and the outer room called the Holy Place, there was a heavy Azure blue curtain that divided the two spaces. God dwelt in His glory in the Holy of Holies on the ark of the covenant sitting in that room. But the glory had left when Israel went into exile. It had never returned. The room was empty of the ark of the covenant and the glory of God. But the veil hid that fact from all except the High Priest who went in once a year. The veil, the curtain, blocked the way into God's presence. No one could enter in, except the High Priest.

Hebrews tells us much about this that we will not be able to explore... But note that the veil was torn from *top to bottom*. This was not done by human hand. The curtain has been rent and the entry into the presence of God has now, once again, been opened. Not since the fall and the cherubim guarding the entrance to the garden has the way been opened. But the rending of the flesh of Christ opened the way into heaven. Just as the Red Sea was parted at the redemption of Israel from Egypt and now as the veil is torn is the way opened for all the redeemed to enter in.

One other significance. When Moses received the Law, His face shone with such glory that a veil was placed over his face. It hid the fading glory of the Law. The veil in the Temple also hid the glory of God and after the exile it hid the departed glory. But now, in Christ, the veils are removed. When one believes, the veil is taken away so that we see the fading of the old and the brightness of the glory of Christ.

Christ has died. The veil is torn. The way is open. We may enter into the glorious Presence.

From the Tombs (v.52-53)

⁵²The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, ⁵³and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many.

There are many questions about this paragraph. I am not going to speculate about this. But let's do be sure we know what Matthew is saying.

When did this happen? Notice it is *after the Lord's resurrection*. It was not at the cross. It was after the resurrection.

Who are they? They were saints who had *fallen asleep*, He is referring to believers who had died. They came out of the tombs.

Where did they appear? Now here is an interesting question. What city is Matthew referring to. I suggest to you that this is not Jerusalem. The holy city *at the time of Matthew's writing* would be heaven, Mt. Zion.

Yet, they appeared to many... This is just difficult. You either have Old Testament saints raised from the dead and appearing in Jerusalem to people. Or you have Old Testament saints raised from the dead, appearing to many and then going to heaven.

So, I am sure Matthew knew exactly what he meant. I am pretty sure... I don't.

With the Testimony (v.54)

This section closes with the testimony...

There is the testimony by the Roman Centurion who was in charge.

⁵⁴When 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 of God!"

Imagine this Gentile Roman commander, overseeing the execution of Jesus. The strange darkness falls, the words from the cross, the earthquake and all that takes place. He hears the mockery. But it is truth that is being used to mock Jesus. His cohort who are with him also affirm, "This was truly the Son of God." AT the cross, in the moment of Jesus' death, a Gentile believes...

There is the presence of the faithful women followers who are near the cross.

⁵⁵There were also many women there, looking on from a distance, who had followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to him, ⁵⁶among whom were Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Joseph and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.

Here are true disciples. They had followed Jesus. They had served Jesus. They risked all for Jesus. They are at the cross. Their names will be remembered.

Reflect and Respond

The world may mock and make fun of us, particularly when we sacrifice all to follow Jesus. But let us always remember that Jesus walked that road before us and for us.

This is the heart of the gospel. Jesus on the cross, dying for us.

Here are the responses to the cross, to the dying of our Redeemer and Ruler:

Mockery...

Unbelief...

Misunderstanding...

Testimony...

Faithfulness...

Yours?