

## **THE REJECTION AND ACCEPTANCE OF JESUS CHRIST (SUNDAY, APRIL 17, 2011)**

---

**SCRIPTURE READING:** EZEKIEL 37:1-14; MATTHEW 27:45-54

### **INTRODUCTION**

Matthew in his gospel tells the account of Christ's crucifixion in only 25 verses and about 365 words. Neither he nor the other gospel writers were attempting to write about each detail or explain the significance of the details that they did include. It is also important to observe that the gospel writers were not attempting to produce simply an emotional response from what they wrote. Not that they have written a dry and lifeless story, but more importantly they have given to the church the story of how Jesus the Son of God was also the rejected Son, obedient in all things including death, so that His perfect life and death were accepted as the perfect sacrifice for our sins.

Matthew's account of Christ's shameful crucifixion can be divided into two main sections. In verses 32-44, Matthew focuses on the mocking, insults, and accusations that were heaped against Christ. This is the first part of the story. The second part of the crucifixion account is given in verses 45-54. In these verses Matthew first focuses on the rejection of Jesus by the Father and the judgment that was poured out on Him. The greatest agony that Jesus experienced was not the physical pain of crucifixion but was the spiritual pain that He bore as the one rejected of God. No movie, no matter how accurate can capture the depths of **this** pain that He bore for us.

Listen to the excellent words from Thomas Kelly, Hymn 192, "Stricken Smitten and Afflicted." The second verse reads:

Tell me, ye who hear him groaning, Was there ever grief like his? Friends  
through fear his cause disowning, Foes insulting his distress;  
Many hands were raised to wound him, None would interpose to save; **But the  
deepest stroke that pierced him Was the stroke that Justice gave.**

Matthew's account, thankfully, does not end with Jesus' rejection, but rather he shows also very powerfully that the sacrifice of Christ was accepted.

The account of Matthew 27:45-54 is the divine record of the rejection of Jesus Christ as well as the acceptance of His great sacrifice.

Know that your sins were placed upon Christ. Know the acceptance of His sacrifice on your behalf.

### **1. THE REJECTION OF JESUS CHRIST, vv. 45-50**

The crucifixion of Jesus started in the morning after a very long night where Jesus was first arrested, tried before Caiaphas the High Priest, where he was also mocked and beaten. He was later brought to Herod and then examined by Pilate who ordered that he

be cruelly scourged. He was stripped of his clothes given instead a crown of thorns and a scarlet robe. This robe was then stripped off as they continued to spit in Jesus' face, beat and mock him as he was forced to carry His own cross on the way to Golgotha. Verses 32-44 focus on the continued mocking and derision of the soldiers, of those crucified with Jesus, and especially of the chief priests, scribes, and elders. It is difficult for us to appreciate the utter shame, horror, and humiliation of Christ's crucifixion.

In Matthew 27:45 there is a change in the account. In the first part of the account Jesus didn't say or do anything. There is also no mention of any actions of God. But this changes now in verses 45-54.

Highlighting this change in focus is the very eerie detail that Matthew records in verse 45. **From the sixth hour until the ninth hour, that is from about 12 p.m. until 3 p.m., there was darkness over all the land.** This was not simply an eclipse of the sun – you can't have that when you have a full moon, nor does a solar eclipse even last that long. Matthew presents no physical cause for the darkness, though God may have used some physical means to cause this darkness. Based on several OT passages it would seem that thick and dark clouds blocked the light of the sun and caused the great darkness. However God brought about this darkness at the brightest part of the day and for three hours, it clearly was a picture of judgment. Israel was warned in Amos 8:9-10 that God would bring judgment for her hypocrisy and exploitation.

**Amos 8:9-10** “And it shall come to pass in that day,” says the Lord GOD, “That I will make the sun go down at noon, And I will darken the earth in broad daylight; I will turn your feasts into mourning, And all your songs into lamentation; I will bring sackcloth on every waist, And baldness on every head; **I will make it like mourning for an only son,** And its end like a bitter day.”

Listen also to Zephaniah 1:15 which describes the Day of the LORD.

**Zeph. 1:15** That day is a day of wrath, A day of trouble and distress, A day of devastation and desolation, A day of darkness and gloominess, A day of clouds and thick darkness,

The crucifixion was a Day of the LORD. It was a day of judgment against Israel, but I think even more significant than judgment coming on Israel is the fact that the NT writers show that judgment was directed against Jesus who bore our sin on the cross. **Jesus did not simply die as an example of love or sacrifice.** Listen to 2 Cor. 5:21.

“For He made Him who knew no sin **to be sin for us,** that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”

We are not told what those who watched the crucifixion thought about the darkness. Rather Matthew focuses on Jesus' response. Here for the first time in Matthew's account an action of Jesus is recorded. Looking at all the gospels, there are 7 sayings that Jesus

spoke on the cross, but Matthew has only given one of those sayings, perhaps to emphasize the theme of Christ's rejection not just by the Romans and the Jews, but by God the Father Himself.

We read in verse 46 that Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" My God, My God, why have you forsaken me? Though Jesus here was quoting from Psalm 22, it is significant that this is the only place where Jesus addresses God without using the expression Father.<sup>1</sup> In the Garden, Jesus still addressed His Father, but here as Jesus bore the full weight of the Father's wrath for our sin, His words shows that this was the greatest of all the conflicts that He faced – a time where He experienced a loss of contact and fellowship with His Father.<sup>2</sup> R. T. France wrote, "This is not just a cry of pain, but an anguished appeal to God which reveals for a moment something of the mental and spiritual torment of the 'cup' Jesus had accepted in Gethsemane."<sup>3</sup>

In verses 47-49, Matthew shows that Jesus' loud cry was misunderstood, twisted, and that he was further mocked as He continued to experience the judgment of the cross. Though Jesus was not asking to be taken down from the cross, those who stood by and watched Him die, claimed that He was calling for Elijah's help. This twisting of Jesus' words is made more sensible by understanding that **Jewish tradition taught that Elijah would come from heaven to help God's people in danger.**<sup>4</sup> Both verses 47 and 49 show the mockery that was shown to Jesus in the midst of his most intense pain. "This Man is calling for Elijah. Let us see if Elijah will come to take Him down."

Further adding to the mockery is the sponge filled with sour wine that was offered to Jesus. This action done in fulfillment of Psalm 69:21 was not an act of kindness but again of rejection. Though this sour wine was used by the soldiers to quench their own thirst, it may well have been offered to Jesus not to relieve His thirst but to revive him in order to prolong his agony.<sup>5</sup>

**Luke 23:36** The soldiers also mocked Him, coming and offering Him sour wine,

The final aspect of Christ's rejection on the cross is given in the brief account of Jesus' death in verse 50. Jesus again cried out with a loud voice. Jesus was not just fading away, but He died in full possession of His senses and still with great pain.<sup>6</sup> Matthew does not record what Jesus said in this final cry. In John's gospel, Jesus declared, "It is Finished." Luke records that Jesus once again spoke of God as His Father; "Father, into your hands I entrust my spirit." But Matthew perhaps emphasizing the rejection of Jesus on the cross simply describes that Jesus with one final and loud cry yielded up His Spirit.

---

<sup>1</sup> France, 1076.

<sup>2</sup> Calvin, s.v. Matthew 27:46.

<sup>3</sup> France, 1075.

<sup>4</sup> France, 1077.

<sup>5</sup> IVP NT Background Commentary, s.v. Matthew 27:48-49.

<sup>6</sup> France, 1078.

In the Greek translation of Psalm 22, the same word **cry** is used three times.

**Psa. 22:2** O My God, I **cry** in the daytime, but You do not hear;  
And in the night season, and am not silent.

**Psa. 22:5** They **cried** to You, and were delivered;  
They trusted in You, and were not ashamed.

**Psa. 22:24** For He has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the  
afflicted; But when He **cried** to Him, He heard.

This last use of the word cry in Psalm 22 is very significant in considering the continued account of Jesus' death.

Jesus did not simply pass out, become unconscious for a time. No, He died. His physical life came to a complete end.

Adam was warned in the Garden of Eden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.

The NT speaks much about the death of Christ as being the triumph over sin, the devil, and death itself. But this triumph was accomplished because Jesus bore the curse of sin and the wrath of God. His death is victory but also the climax of His being made sin for us.

## **2. THE ACCEPTANCE OF CHRIST AND HIS SACRIFICE, VV. 51-54**

Psalm 22 begins with the cry of rejection. It ends though celebrating final deliverance and victory. And in a similar way, Matthew after presenting the rejection of Christ on the cross ends his account showing the acceptance of Christ's sacrifice and His victory.

Matthew presents 5 amazing and supernatural signs that followed Christ's crucifixion which show clearly that Christ's sacrifice was not in vain and with His resurrection there was the end of the old covenant and the beginning of the new covenant.

First, from verse 51 we see that God in a dramatic fashion ripped the massive veil of the temple in two from **top to bottom**. We are not told whether this was the massive outer veil, a curtain 7 stories in height that hung in front of the equally massive gold-plated wooden doors, or whether this veil was the inner veil which blocked the entrance into the Holy of Holies. It is theologically more likely that it was this inner veil or curtain that God tore showing dramatically that the old sacrificial system was finished.

**Heb. 10:19** Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, **20** by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh.

Second and third from verse 51 we see that God shook the earth and split or ripped the rocks into two. Both of these actions are found throughout the OT as pictures of God's judgment on those in rebellion. These actions again show that the death of Christ was a Day of the LORD. We could look at Jeremiah 4:23-24 which describes God bringing both darkness and the shaking of the earth in response to the evil of His people. Listen also to Ezekiel 38:19.

**Ezek. 38:19** For in My jealousy *and* in the fire of My wrath I have spoken:  
“Surely in that day there shall be a great earthquake in the land of Israel...”

Those who mocked Jesus in His pain and agony demanded a sign from heaven in the coming of Elijah. But here God was powerfully demonstrating the significance of the death of Jesus and the judgment that would come to those who continue in their rebellion.<sup>7</sup>

And then in verse 52, two other powerful signs are recorded. Graves were opened and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised. And then in verse 53 we read, “and coming out of the graves after His resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many.” Only Matthew records this amazing miracle of the raising of dead saints. I believe the best way of understanding these verses is to understand actions both connected with Christ's death and with His resurrection. At the earthquake of verse 41, tombs were opened. After Christ's resurrection the bodies were raised and they came into Jerusalem.

Who were these saints, these holy ones who were raised? We know only two details. Many were raised. This means more than just one or two, but how many we don't know. Second, likely they were saints living near Jerusalem. They entered the holy city and appeared to many.

Some commentators suggest that we should not understand verses 52 and 53 as having literally happened. But why not? Just because we can't understand all the details or that they are difficult doesn't mean we simply understand this in a metaphorical way.

We also should see a connection here with Ezekiel 37:12-13.

**Ezekiel 37:12** Therefore prophesy and say to them, “Thus says the Lord GOD: ‘Behold, O My people, I will open your graves and cause you to come up from your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. **13** Then you shall know that I *am* the LORD, when I have opened your graves, O My people, and brought you up from your graves.’”

Finally then in verse 54 we have another powerful response to the death of Christ. **So when the centurion and those with him, who were guarding Jesus, saw the earthquake and the things that had happened, they feared greatly, saying, “Truly this was the Son of God!”**

---

<sup>7</sup> R. E. Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, Vol. 2, 1120.

I don't know that we have enough information presented here to say that this one centurion and the others with him were converted at this time having come to a full understanding of Jesus and His work on the cross. But it is worth noting that the words spoken by this centurion have only been spoken before by the disciples of Jesus. It was Peter who earlier declared to Jesus, You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. The religious leaders condemned Jesus for blasphemy for affirming that He was the Son of God. But now this one centurion and the others with him were given insight that those in Israel did not have. We have here as throughout Matthew's gospel a picture of the gospel going to the nations.

We also who are responsible for his death are led to again declare, Truly this was the Son of God!

### **3. FINAL APPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION**

Should you seek to sorrow over your sins? Is remorse for sin a correct response to sin? The NT does not speak a great deal on this subject, but Paul in 2 Corinthians speaks of sorrow leading to repentance. "Godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death." **2 Cor. 7:10**. Verse 11 of the same chapter speaks of a showing sorrow in a godly way.

So certainly there is a place for sorrow in the Christian life over failure and sin. But how important it is to know that there is no way that you could find forgiveness simply through your own sorrow over sin. Your sorrow for sin could never compare to what Christ bore on the cross. So although sorrow when it leads to repentance is good, it can never be the ultimate grounds of your assurance. You could be sorry for a million years, but still what would that truly accomplish in satisfying the wrath and justice of a holy God?

In a similar way, godly works are the proper response to Christ's work on the cross. And you know full well that you could do good works for a million years and still never find acceptance. Rest and rejoice knowing that Christ's sacrifice was accepted. This is your peace and acceptance before God.

I close by reading the final two verses from the hymn by Thomas Kelly that I earlier mentioned.

Ye who think of sin but lightly  
Nor suppose the evil great  
Here may view its nature rightly,  
Here its guilt may estimate.  
Mark the Sacrifice appointed,  
See who bears the awful load;  
'Tis the Word, the Lord's Anointed,  
Son of Man and Son of God.

Here we have a firm foundation,  
Here the refuge of the lost;  
Christ's the Rock of our salvation,  
His the name of which we boast.  
Lamb of God, for sinners wounded,  
Sacrifice to cancel guilt!  
**None shall ever be confounded  
Who on him their hope have built.**

Know that your sins were placed upon Christ. Know the acceptance of His sacrifice on your behalf.

**Closing Hymn: 176**

**Benediction – Hebrews 12:1-2**

Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares *us*, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of *our* faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.