

Crucified

Matthew 27:32-56

April 17, 2011

We take a break this morning from our journey through Paul's letter to the Romans to look again at the end of Jesus' journey to the cross. We step into the story near the end. Matthew has written of Jesus' life, His ministry, His miracles, His teaching, and now we join the journey as Jesus comes to His death. The cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ are the foundation of all the church has believed and taught since its inception. This passage is the first half of why we are here—of why the church exists.

As Jesus made His way to Calvary, the events of the previous hours began to take their toll on Him. He had spent an emotional night in prayer and gotten no sleep. He had been beaten until He was almost dead. Now, He was trying to carry this heavy piece of wood through narrow streets lined with jeering crowds. Without sleep, and having lost a lot of blood already, it is not surprising He could not make it. So the guards pulled someone at random out of the crowd. This man's name, Simon, might have been lost to history, but Matthew tells us who he is. Service rendered to Christ, is not **forgotten**. Simon was just visiting Jerusalem, and yet he found himself forced to carry the cross of a condemned man. It wasn't what he had planned to do that day. God did not forget his service, however, and He made sure we would not forget it either.

Once they arrived at the crucifixion site, Jesus was offered wine, which He refused after tasting it. This drink, as bitter and acidic as it was, was the only act of

kindness offered to Jesus that Matthew records. While it was a very low quality wine, there was still some alcohol. Even more to the point, there was a drug mixed in. The women of Jerusalem usually offered this to men about to be crucified. They gave Proverbs 31:6&7 as their reason. *“Give beer to those who are perishing, wine to those who are in anguish; let them drink and forget their poverty and remember their misery no more.”* There was some drug they added to it. Matthew calls it gall. Mark calls it myrrh. Whatever it was, the idea was to provide some alleviation from the suffering the man was about to endure. Jesus was thirsty as shown by His willingness to drink, but when He tasted the drug, He refused any more. He refused to go to the cross drunk or drugged. Jesus intended to endure the **pain** as clear-headed and aware as possible. He was nailed to the cross and it was lifted into position.

Almost every detail in Matthew's account is predicted by the prophets or the wisdom literature. There are those today who say that Matthew read the scriptures and crafted his tale of Jesus to meet them. Yet we know from other sources that Jesus' crucifixion wasn't unusual in many respects. It certainly started off normally enough. It was not just Jesus' execution the prophets predicted, but crucifixion in general. Matthew didn't make up the story to add to Jesus' credibility. God predicted what He would do to His Son, so that His people would recognize it when the event came. One of those details is the dividing of Jesus' clothes among the guards who watched Him. When they got to His cloak, which was rather nice, they cast lots for it instead of ripping it up as they had done the other garments. By

doing this near the cross, the guards reminded the condemned that they wouldn't need their clothes anymore. Everything about crucifixion was designed to increase pain and **shame**.

The next step in adding to the shame of those who were dying was to write out the charges against them and nail them to the cross over their head. Thus the charge against Jesus was placed over His head: "*THIS IS JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS.*" (v.37) Rather ironic, isn't it, that they had to lie to get Him crucified, when the real charge and reason was actually true. They meant to insult Him, but the Father ensured that the real reason He was there was made clear. He was their true King, the descendant of David for whom they had long waited, and when He arrived they rejected Him, beat Him, and executed Him. We look back and shake our heads and chastise them for their foolishness, and it was foolish. Yet we are no better. We know the right thing to do, and we do not do it. We rejected Him for years until the Holy Spirit finally got a hold of our hearts and softened them. We aren't any better. He is our King too, our God and our Maker, yet we still stubbornly insist on doing our own thing.

It wasn't just the guards who insulted Jesus. As people came across those who were crucified, it was common to insult them. After all, they were criminals and the worst of society, right? Yet here was Jesus. He never sinned. He never broke any laws. He never lied to His mother or father. He was crucified, and numbered among the worst of society, and the average, ordinary people treated Him as if He were a base criminal. These were the people who had heard about His miracles.

They were aware of His ministry. Many of them had probably come to Jerusalem for Passover hoping to catch a glimpse of Him. And here He was, His true title hanging over His head, and the people mocked and jeered. Even as He hung on the cross they demanded miracles. Charles Haddon Spurgeon remarked, "O think, that he who was master of all heaven's majesty came down to be the victim of all man's misery!" There was nothing that could be done to insult a man that was not done to Jesus. Look at the way He was treated by those who came to watch Him die and those who passed by on the road. Jesus could have saved Himself, but He chose not to because in saving Himself He could not have saved **us**.

Then God started to mourn as an unnatural darkness fell over the land. For three hours it became unusually dark. As John would later write, "*In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.*" (John 1:4,5) The people did not understand the light so they snuffed it out. The Father provided a fitting visual demonstration for all of what was happening on the cross.

Jesus called out after 3 hours of darkness. "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*" (v.46) His call had two meanings. First, He called those watching to remember Psalm 22. Jesus' words are a quote of the beginning of Psalm 22. I said earlier that the scriptures predict in some detail what would happen to Jesus. One of the clearest of those foreshadowings is this Psalm which graphically describes the rejection, humiliation, and death of Jesus. Yet it also speaks of enduring trust

in God and the Lord's faithfulness for generations. It is a cry of anguish that calls out to God to be faithful again as He was in the past. Jesus wanted the people at the cross to think through it as He hung there.

Second, He honestly called out to the Father, Who, for the first time in eternity, turned His back on the Son. He didn't just quote the Psalms, this was also the cry of His heart. As bad as the physical pain was, it was not the cup that Jesus had prayed in the garden might be removed. The physical torment of the cross, the jeering of the crowd, and the humiliation He was suffering were all things He could have endured as long as He was aware of the Father's love and that He was in the Father's will. As Jesus hung on the cross and the sins of all who would believe in Him were heaped upon Him, the Father turned His back on Jesus. God's **wrath** was poured out on His Son as Jesus took the full punishment for the sins of those He came to save. God the Son knew death. The love of the Father and the Spirit for the Son was broken as Jesus became every vile, evil, and wicked thing imaginable, some of it from you and me.

Of course the people standing around Him missed it. We are all pretty dense and thick to the spiritual truths and realities around us. They thought He was delirious from the pain and was calling out to the prophet Elijah. One of them thought to give Jesus something to drink to help clear His head. The rest took an attitude of sitting back and waiting to see what happened. After all, Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, maybe Elijah would come to help Him.

Of course, we know it wasn't to be. Matthew just says "He cried out again," without identifying what He

said. John identifies Jesus' last words as, "*It is finished.*" (John 19:30) Luke tells us, "*Jesus called out with a loud voice, 'Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.'* When he had said this, he breathed his last." (Luke 23:46) Jesus likely said both. That the authors don't agree is not reason to think any of them are lying. If one or more was lying or making it up, you would think they would do a better job of getting their stories straight and agreeing with each other. Jesus likely said both, and the words impacted those standing there differently.

Matthew seems to be including both phrases in his account. What is important to Matthew, more than what Jesus said, is how Jesus said it. Jesus cried out with a loud voice. This was not the feeble whisper of a man who had no strength. Jesus called out for all to hear. Even at this late stage it was not those who put Jesus on the cross who took His life from Him. He gave His life willingly, of His own accord. Even to the end it was **Jesus**, not the soldiers or the religious leaders, who was actually in charge of the situation.

In spite of the pain, the humiliation, and the rejection by God, Jesus hung on the cross because He willed to. He willingly endured it because He knew the end result would be glory for God and salvation for God's people. The author of Hebrews would later write of Him, ". . . *who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*" (Hebrews 12:2)

Jesus' cry was heard as the Father again responded to events of that day. Just as the darkness fell over the earth when they began to snuff out the light God had

sent. Now that the light was coming back and the Father's wrath had been poured out on Jesus, another set of miracles took place.

The first was the **curtain** that separated the presence of God from the people was torn in two—from top to bottom. This was a thick, heavy cloth that hung in the Temple to separate the most holy place from the rest of the building. As one drew near the temple, there were a series of courtyards, each one allowing fewer people in. Once you got to the building, only the priests were allowed inside. Inside was divided into two rooms. The priests could go into the first, the Holy Place, but only the high priest could go into the Holy of Holies, and that only once a year. The Holy of Holies is where God's presence was. The tearing of this curtain meant that God was no longer confined to the Holy of Holies. All could now come to Him. God was out of the box. The fact that it tore from the top to the bottom meant that it was God who had done it. The sacrifice of all sacrifices had been made. The temple rituals were no longer needed because they had all been fulfilled in Jesus' death on the cross.

The second miracle is an **earthquake** that split the rocks and opened the tombs. Matthew then looks ahead to Jesus' resurrection. The bodies of many who died believing in God were raised to life. Some of those tombs that were opened in the earthquake were also emptied when Jesus was raised from the dead. Matthew's is the only record we have of this event, and so we only know what little he has told us. Jesus died to bring life to God's people. This raising from the dead of

many holy people was a deposit on the coming resurrection of all who believe.

The earthquake, on top of the other things they saw that day, terrified the guards that were watching Jesus. It was clear to the head of the Roman guards that there was something very special about Jesus. The centurion declared, "*Surely he was God's Son*" (v.54)

Through it all were the women who followed Jesus. Matthew does not mention any other of Jesus' followers. He is silent about any support Jesus had at the cross. From the other gospel accounts we know that John was there, but none of the other men.

Jesus dies void of most of His support and abandoned by the Father, but not dejected. He was in great pain and agony, and knew the rejection of the Father, but He also knew that His death was not to be the last word. He knew the glory that would come of it and the salvation it would bring.

Oh, to think that He underwent all of this for those He came to save! He could have been spared all of it if He were only willing to allow us to die in our sins. What manner of love is this, that God the Son would suffer and die in this way that we might be bought back by His blood and have a share in His life! What heart is not broken by this outpouring of love and affection by God on those who are His enemies. This is God's love for us! This is the depth and heights to which He will go to bring us salvation! This is His glory and majesty! It all belongs to the one Who was crucified for us!