

NOON BIBLE STUDY: MATTHEW 27 (PART 3)

Matthew 27:27-32 - Abused By Soldiers, Led To Golgotha

Mocking The King - “A (disturbing) 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, we read of pirates mocking a man who says he is a Roman, stripping him, scourging him and killing him. That is what the soldiers did with Jesus.” (Michael Green, “The Message of Matthew”, The Bible Speaks Today, page 294.)

v. 32 - Simon of Cyrene - “Simon appears as a chance passer-by, but the memory of his name (and of his family, Mark 15:21) suggests that he may have joined the disciples of Jesus as a result of this experience.” (R. T. France, Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary, vol. 1, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, page 400.)

Interestingly, the gospel writers don’t spend a ton of time focusing on the intricate details of what crucifixion entailed. Surely, we likely have heard many stories and detailed descriptions and depictions of crucifixion, but most of those sources are historical and not directly from the Biblical text. Matthew simply uses “crucify” (v. 31) and “crucified” (v. 35) to describe what happened, not mentioning him being nailed or pierced in the side, etc.

Matthew instead focuses on the meaning of the crucifixion and on what is happening around Jesus, most recently with the mocking of the Gentile soldiers, and later the mocking of the Jewish leaders and others crucified with him.

Perhaps Matthew assumes the reader will know about the practice of crucifixion already. Perhaps it was painful for him to remember in detailed writing. Perhaps he wants to highlight other important details instead of the reader closing the book if unable to read of the suffering of Christ.

However, I do want to take some time to speak of the historical details around crucifixion. I think it’s important to understand what it was, how it worked and what it must have been like.

Crucifixion:

R. T. France, Matthew: An Introduction & Commentary, vol. 1, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, pg 399 - “Crucifixion, while never sanctioned by Jewish law, was a common sight in Palestine from the first century BC on; it was the punishment used by the Romans particularly for political rebels and violent criminals, carried out with maximum publicity so as to be a deterrent to others.

ESV Study Bible on Matthew 27:35 - Crucifixion was widely believed to be the worst form of execution, due to the excruciating pain and public shame. Hanging suspended by one’s arms

eventually caused great difficulty in breathing, which could be alleviated only by pushing up with one's feet to take the weight off the arms. But that motion itself would cause severe pain in the feet, arms, legs, and back, causing the exhausted victim to slump down again, only to be nearly unable to breathe once more. Eventually, the victim would succumb to suffocation, if he had not already died as a result of the cumulative effect of the physical trauma inflicted on him.

Michael Green, The Message of Matthew: The Bible Speaks Today, pages 295–296 - “The death of Jesus by crucifixion is without question the most famous death in all history. It was a very grisly method of execution, which the Romans took over from the Carthaginians. Cicero affirmed that ‘this most cruel and terrible punishment’ was so degrading that it should not even be discussed by Roman citizens. It was reserved for the lowest of the low.

This was the form of execution which the Romans used in Judea for capital offences. There were various ways of carrying it out. The most basic way was to hang a man or impale him on a stake (*crux simplex*). Generally there was a crossbeam (*patibulum*) across the stipes, or upright. It could be fixed at the top of the upright, making the shape of a capital T (*crux commissa*). More often it was fixed a third of the way down (*crux inmissa*), and it is widely believed that Jesus was killed on a cross of this shape. The third variety was what we know as the St Andrew's cross, shaped like a capital X (*crux decussata*) on which the victim could be stretched either the right way up or upside down. Simon Peter was said to have been crucified upside down.

The condemned man was invariably scourged, and men were known to die under that punishment alone, so severe were the wounds inflicted by this cruel cat-o'-nine-tails inset with metal. If he survived the scourging he had to carry the patibulum of his cross, and was led out under an armed guard of Roman soldiers to die.

There were several ways in which a condemned man might be fixed to the cross. He might have his wrists tied or nailed to the patibulum and then be hauled by ropes up on to the stipes, which was already firmly fixed in the ground. More commonly, the cross was put together on the ground, the condemned man bound or nailed to it, and the whole thing then erected by dropping its base into a pit that had been prepared to receive it. The degradation was made complete by the removal of all clothes from the criminal. He was crucified stark naked. Sometimes a draught of rough, drugged wine was offered to the condemned man to help dull some of the pain; rich Jerusalem women used to prepare it as a work of mercy. Jesus refused the drugged wine. He was in complete possession of all his faculties as he faced the full rigour of the most agonizing death known to humankind.

The physical effects of crucifixion were appalling. Of all deaths it is the most lingering. The suspension of the whole body on jagged iron nails (one dating from AD 50 has been discovered in Jerusalem), driven through the most sensitive nerve centres of the wrists and ankles, ensured constant torture. When it was deemed to have gone on long enough, the soldiers would perform the *crurifragium*, or breaking of the legs. This would ensure that the man, if still alive, could no longer hoist himself up to breathe and would soon expire.

That is the death which Jesus undertook for humankind.”

Matthew 27:33-37, 38-45 - Jesus On The Cross, Mocking From All Sides

Q - What do you think of this moment? What stands out to you the most and why?

The Gentiles mocked Jesus in the first section of our passage today, and now the Jewish leaders are the focus of Matthew's account.

How remarkable it is to consider the titles that these people use in attempts to mock and ridicule Jesus. Little did they know they were declaring truth even as they cried out in sarcasm and disrespect

King of the Jews (v. 37)

Builder of Temple (v. 40)

Son of God (v. 40)

Savior (v. 42)

King of Israel (v. 42)

One who trusts in God (v. 43)

Son of God (v. 43)

These titles fill the air as Jesus suffers and dies. They are spoken by wicked and hardened men with malicious intent, yet every title is true. The mockers think they are discrediting Jesus, but Matthew shows us they are actually bearing witness to Him. Matthew does not spend much time describing the physical details of the crucifixion itself. He does not focus on the nails, the blood, or the agony. Instead, Matthew draws our attention to the words being spoken at the cross. As Jesus hangs there suffering, the truth about His identity is being proclaimed all around Him, even by his enemies.

The crowd says, "Save Yourself." The religious leaders sneer, "He saved others; He cannot save Himself." Yet this is the very heart of the gospel. Jesus would not save Himself because He came to save others. The mockers believed remaining on the cross proved He was powerless, when in reality remaining on the cross demonstrated His obedience, love, and authority.

And as we pause here at the second to last chapter of Matthew's gospel, we remember and stand amazed at the love of Jesus - and we would do well to remember the early chapters of Matthew's biography in light of these final statements.

Chapter 27 tells us Jesus is called king of the Jews (v. 37), Builder of Temple (v. 40), Son of God (v. 40), Savior (v. 42), King of Israel (v. 42), One who trusts in God (v. 43), and again, Son of God (v. 43).

Chapter 1 tells us of the moment Jesus is named:

Matthew 1:21 - "She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins."

Chapter 2 tells us who the foreign travelers arriving in Jerusalem were looking for:

Matthew 2:1-2 - Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, 2 "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him."

Chapter 3 tells us what God declared over Jesus at his baptism:

Matthew 3:16-17 - After being baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and lighting on Him, 17 and behold, a voice out of the heavens said, "This is **My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased.**"

These words are for us today. The birth of Jesus was exciting and hope-giving, but Jesus saves us not as baby, but as the lamb of God, slain for us. The fulfilled prophecy of the Messiah's birth in Bethlehem gives us confidence that God's word is true, but the descendant of David is first dying for the forgiveness of sins before he comes as conquering king. And the baptism of Jesus is when the Father declares his love for His son, but it is not the final time the son of God will cling to those words.

But these words were not merely spoken for future readers reflecting on the cross. They were also spoken within earshot of Jesus Himself. It is widely believed that as a person dies, the sense of hearing remains even as other senses begin to fail. Consider, then, that with every title shouted in mockery at the cross, Jesus hears not merely the hatred in their voices, but the truth of the words themselves.

King of the Jews. Son of God. Savior. King of Israel.

Every promise of God, every prophecy, and every detail of His messianic mission has been and will be fulfilled. His death is not the end. It is the doorway through which redemption is accomplished and eternity is opened to sinners.

And the final word does not belong to Caiaphas, Pilate, the soldiers, the crowds, or the criminals hanging beside Him. **The Father has the final word.** This dark moment is not the end of the beloved Son in whom He is well-pleased.