

SERMON TRANSCRIPT

03.24.2024 | The Shame of the Cross and the Power of God | Matthew 27:32-66 | Clark Fobes, Associate Pastor

We are in our final couple weeks of the Gospel of Matthew. And I was just going to think about it's been over a year, maybe almost a year and a half now. So maybe you're coming to this point here thinking, thank God it's over or maybe you're just amazed. We just have privilege to walk through a book like this. Such depth was such a longevity. I think to be honest, it's something that I found more rare these days. Churches especially in the city like ours, to be able to walk through a book of violence entirely. So for this morning we're going to be looking at Matthew 27. We're going to start on verse 32. We're going to make our way through it throughout the sermon. And I'm just going to start and read the first section there, 32 through 44. And then we'll read subsequent sections as we go along. Start Matthew 27, start on verse 32. Yeah, excuse me. While salvation has come today, sickness has come to my house. So I'd be struggling a little bit to get through this, but we'll get through it.

As they went out, they found a man of sight, sighted by him. They compelled his men to carry his cross. And when they came to a place called Golgotha, which means place of skull, they offered him wine to drink mixed with gall. But when he tasted it, he would not drink it. When they had crucified him, they divided his garments among them by casting lots. Then they sat down and kept watch over him there. And over his head they put the charge against him with scrolls. This is Jesus, the king of the Jews. Then two robbers were crucified with him, one on the right and one on the left. And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads, and 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. So also, as he preached with scribes and elders mocked and saying, "He saved others, he cannot save himself." He's the king of Israel. Let him come down now from the cross and we will believe him. He trusts in God. Let God deliver now if he desires him. For he said, "I am the son of God." And the robbers were crucified with him also, or about him in the same way.

I don't know if you're aware, but this year marks the 20th anniversary of the film, The Passion of Christ. It came out in February 2004. I remember it clearly because I was in high school when the film came out. And naturally it made a big blockbuster Hollywood film, I think directed by Mel Gibson, a Christian film that I released. A lot of my friends in the 80th group sought to go and watch the film. But the problem was, this was an already-did film, and I was at a conservative Chinese church. And so there was no way a youth pastor was going to bring his youth group to watch an already-did film. Well, myself and some of the upper classmen in the youth industry decided, "We're going to go watch it anyway." And so we gathered a group, and we went on a Saturday morning to go watch The Passion of Christ. So we were doing a great Christian thing, meeting our youth group. But there was no problem, because it was already-did, and we were all under 18, and we could not buy our own tickets to watch the film. We had to ask some random adults standing in line to buy tickets for about 30 teenagers to watch this film. We were pleading with them, "Please, we just, we want to watch this film." And I just remember that experience of watching that film. We dug in, and we were able to get tickets. But I remember just the, honestly, the shock of the film. As you're playing, you've seen it, maybe you remember feeling similarly shocked at the quite graphic depictions of Jesus beating and crucifixion and death. And while it's very historically accurate, it did, I think, an incredible job of digging into the backgrounds, what I find interesting is that when it comes to our accounts of the crucifixion in Scripture, they lack much of the shock and awe and gore of a film like The Passion of the Christ.

The gospel writers don't really seem that interested in the physical details surrounding Jesus' death. They are interested in the details, but not in the way that we tend to think. Even the one line that we're told of Jesus crucified, it's kind of a tossed-out line. We're told in verse 35, "When they had crucified him, they divided his garments." That term "crucified," that word for crucified, it's not even the main verb of that sentence. It's a supporting verb to the other word they're dividing his garments. And it seems like for Matthew and the gospel writers, they're maybe potentially shying away from the physical dimensions of Jesus suffering on the cross. Sometimes they think that maybe it's because it was too gruesome to describe. Why would they want to revisit such a gruesome depiction of Jesus' death? Maybe it's because it was well known what crucifixion meant to the times and the peers and their readers. So they didn't need to go over the more details. But it seems kind of a significant detail to just pass over. Any reader or fiction will know that when an author wants to draw you in the story, they'll describe the events with "vividness" and "detail." And yet Matthew gives us none of that, and at least when it concerns Jesus' physical suffering. I think there is "vividness" and "detail," but it's focused elsewhere. And so in this sermon, we're not going to look maybe traditionally at what the cross means and what

Jesus did and what happened to him. But rather than think what Matthew is presenting for us is, what does the cross accomplish, and how do Jesus desire people to respond to Jesus as a crucified Messiah? So we're going to get three characters that reveal what Jesus has accomplished and how Matthew intends us to respond. We're starting with Simon, seemingly insignificant character, but we are led, Matthew leads us to embrace scorn with Simon. He's the very first character that we're told in this story. He takes up the cross of Jesus.

What's interesting is throughout this depiction of the crucifixion, Matthew doesn't focus on the physical as we mentioned, but he focused more on the social dimensions of Jesus' crucifixion, the shame surrounding crucifixion. It's likely that Matthew is trying to pull us in to see that the social shame that Jesus has dealt was maybe just as much or even more so a greater suffering for Jesus than the physical things he went through. I mentioned that the word "crucified" is crucified, it's a supporting verb to dividing his garments. And maybe Matthew is intentional about that because he wants us to remember the way that people were crucified. When they divided his garments, that meant Jesus was crucified naked with nothing on his body. He would have nothing to cover himself in, even beyond that, he was crucified naked in a public place. He looked at verse 39. And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads. Now, all throughout the crucifixion, we get these descriptions of the bystanders, people passing by. There's some interesting discussion about where Jesus was actually crucified. If you remember seeing that film, "The Passion of the Christ," many depictions even in history, in order to pick Jesus as being crucified, kind of up on a hill far away from Jerusalem. Maybe you'll see the city of Jerusalem in the background, but they seem to be just in isolation on this hill. Now, that is probably accurate in some sense because Jewish law prohibited stonings or executions to be done within the camp of Israel, so they would have wanted the execution to be done outside the camp.

But this was a method of execution by the Roman government, which means they would have publicly executed people. They would have wanted some of the executed in a public space where people could pass by and see if this executed criminal would be a lesson for those that passed by. They would have wanted more on the rest of the Roman Empire, on what would happen if they also transgressed Roman law. So, more likely than not, as I mentioned at the beginning of the service, Jesus was probably crucified just outside the city walls, maybe even off the main road where people come and go in and out of the city. So, Jesus was publicly crucified, naked on a cross. And as the Romans used this as a means of making a lesson or example out of these criminals, it was reserved for the worst of criminals. Which begs the question, why were told Jesus is crucified with the robbers? You think of verse 38? We're told that two robbers were crucified within, one on the right and one on the left. These are just robbers. They just may be stolen something from the Roman government or stolen something from the high priest. They would have probably been reprimands slapped on the wrist, maybe put in jail, but they likely would not have been crucified.

This is, unfortunately, maybe just an older translation of the same word that was used of the rabbis, the insurrectionist who just learned about last week. See, the insurrectionists, these were not robbers, they were rebels. They were treasonists, terrorists against the Roman Empire. So, for these criminals, these were seen as the worst of criminals in Rome because they were sought to overthrow the Roman government. So, even just to kind of think about why were there already three crosses at Golgotha? The way people were crucified, they would have carried these cross beams, that's what Nicole Simon does, and those cross beams would have been laid on top of a vertical post that was already planted in the ground. Something that the Roman guards would have had to prepare before the execution took place. Which probably means that that third cross that Jesus was sought to turn across was probably meant for a rabbis. Which means these two robbers, these two insurrectionists, were likely also insurrectionists with rabbis. They were in maybe the very same insurrection that a rabbis was in, and so for Jesus to be crucified with them was a sign both that he literally took a rabbis in place,(...) but also that Jesus was counted as an insurrectionist among these other insurrectionists. It was reserved for the lowliest of criminals, the lowest classes. Roman citizens could not be crucified except for a direct decree from Caesar himself.

So Jesus, he was crucified as publicly, pain naked, as one of the most debased and ridiculed people in society. Just kind of imagine the shame that that would have brought upon Jesus, the shame that it's scored, he would have endured. Many of us have had dreams of being naked, maybe as kids, or feeling exposed before people, and thankfully those dreams are over in minutes, hopefully, when you're asleep. But Jesus is there hung on the cross, an example that could have taken days, but Jesus' case took hours at least. There's the embarrassment and shame that Jesus has had when he hung on the cross. One commentator who goes to a partner visualizes a scene for us, he says, "One being executed on the cross could

not spotlight someone's wounds, nor hold one's bodily waste from coming out while hanging naked for hours, sometimes days." I don't want to give you any more visualization there, but the type of shame that Jesus endured on the cross. I think Matthew is trying to remind us that when it comes to the crucifixion, there is, beyond the physical, there is a social shame, a psychological shame that is maybe even worse. This is not to diminish the physical suffering that Jesus went through, I think Jesus' physical sufferings were definitely part of him in paying for our sins on the cross. There needed to be physical suffering in it, but probably more than that was the social suffering shame Jesus endured. Physical suffering is hard. My kids and my family have been sick for the last, like, nine weeks, so we are tired and exhausted, do you feel that? But I think most of us understand that when it comes to deep anguish that we feel, it doesn't often come from physical suffering, but when there is a social or social shame in dimension to it.

A novel I recently read called Pachinko recounts the story of Koreans who were imprisoned in Japan, imprisoned in the war, and then lived through Japan. And then all throughout Minn and Lee's novel, she talks about the social shame that these Korean-Japanese people faced, who often were sworn and rejected by the Japanese in Korea and Japan, but couldn't even go home because they would be rejected as being not Korean enough because they were Japanese. And this led to a lot of suicides that happened from these Korean-Japanese people at the time. There was this deep anguish that Jesus would have received as he was rejected thoroughly by all people around him. That's another thing that Matthew shows us, that he is rejected thoroughly by all social speakers. There is an interesting detail that we are told that when they offered Jesus wine, it happens twice, happens once in verse 34, they offered him wine drink mixed with a gall when he tasted it he would not drink. And it shows us again a little later when they mistake him for calling out to Elijah. There is a question over what this actually means. Are they offering Jesus wine mixed with a gall or whatever that was to be a sort of narcotic, to help Jesus alleviate the pain he is going through?

Some people think that, and there is some precedence for it in Proverbs 31-6. Proverbs say, "Get strong drink to the one who is perishing and wine to those in bitter distress." That was a favorite verse of my non-Christian high school friends that would argue for underage drinking because of the amount of pain. So we have to get out of distress. And so maybe that's the case. Maybe this was a way to dole the senses, help Jesus endure the pain. Very much like how with Jesus is a painkiller in Proverbs 31-1. But just a kind of thing, so Proverbs 2 will say, if Jesus refuses the drink, he was bravely going to the cross, taking the full weight of the punishment of four sinners. But again, I think that would draw our attention more on the physical dimension, whereas Matthew wants to see the social dimension and the shame. If wine was meant to be a painkiller, I am pretty sure Jesus would need a sponge, he would probably need a bucket of it to dole his senses. More likely, this is a connection to Psalm 61-21. With the Psalmist's rights, they gave me poison for food, and for my thirst they gave me sour wine to drink. This is a Psalm of David lamenting people around him, mocking him. Martell's is more specifically that they mix the wine with myrrh, but Matthew uses more quality of the taste than gall or bitterness. But what was intended to be a thirst-quenching maybe for Jesus was only used to mock him further.

It kind of reminds me when I was in college, we used to play these amazing race-type games on my college campus. I participated once with my campus ministry. We had to run up six flights of stairs, and at the top we had to chug a bottle of Sprite as our challenge. And you know, you think after running up six flights of stairs, a bottle of Sprite would be a welcome quenching to your thirst. And I remember as I started drinking it, I thought, "This is funny, it doesn't taste weird." Maybe it's just my palate's dry from running so much. It wasn't until I got almost to the end that I realized that they had mixed vinegar in with the Sprite just as a joke to mock us for their entertainment. That's probably what the soldiers were doing to Jesus. What was intended to be a thirst-quenching act was really just for their entertainment. To give us a picture where Jesus is thoroughly mocked. He's alone. He is shamed with no one to comfort him. There are no comforts near him. We can see that in all social spheres Jesus is rejected and mocked. From the high-class priests to low-class criminals on his left and right to everyone in between with the crowds and the bystanders, he is ridiculed by all.

We're told that they use some of the very same tactics that Satan uses in the wilderness to map before. Maybe indicating that this is Satan's last final attempt to tempt Jesus out of the cross when even Satan uses the term "Son of God," take yourself down. Throw yourself down that people may be saved. The same thing that the Chibi priests mock Jesus with. The religious leaders even mock Jesus with this sense of, "Because he is not delivered by God, he must be rejected by God." There's a sense in their mockery that because he is not saved by God, he's not delivered, he's therefore been rejected by God. And the better I think in their mockery is this idea that those that are accepted by God, they should be alleviated from suffering by God. And in Jewish understanding, that I think maybe even Matthew cues us in here to see

along with Simon that identifying with Jesus will mean identifying in his rejection and his shame in the world's eyes. Simon stands alone here as the only one by Jesus. There's no one around. We'll see a little bit later that there are some faithful disciples, but they're not here at the crucifixion. Simon is the only one.(...) He's called to carry the cross of Jesus. It's interesting, even in the very same language that's used as Simon bearing Jesus' cross, it mimics what Jesus says really to his disciples in chapter 16 verse 24. "If anyone will come after me, let him to define himself and take up his cross and follow me." There's plenty of irony to that as he's showing us here that this was a job meant for the disciples. The disciples literally should have been by Jesus' side in his last hours, bearing his cross following him to Golgotha. And yet even his own disciples have deserted him, as we've seen all through the last few chapters of Matthew's accounts. This isn't so much a comment, I think, on Simon's bravery or courage. He was just thrown into it. He didn't volunteer, but simply by nature, being there, he was chosen to bear Jesus' cross. We don't really know why they choose Simon, but Mark tells us some details about Simon that lead us to believe that he was a disciple of Jesus, or at least became a follower of Jesus after the fact. So it's possible that Simon was one of the very few disciples left, even at the scene, and the guards recognized him in mockery, called him to bear Jesus' cross as they walked up to Golgotha. Matthew's illustrating a point that if anyone is left to follow Jesus, mockery, shame, and rejection should follow him, because Jesus is a king of suffering and shame.

There's an ironic picture here where Jesus is a king, and yet he's a king who trains a crown of jewels for a crown of thorns. He's a king who trades a throne for a cross. He's a king who, instead of having royal advisors on his left and right, he has criminals on his left and right. Instead of loyal subjects who adore him, there are crowded enemies who mock him. Matthew reminds us that following Jesus means following in the shame of the cross. I think a lot of times we talk about how in the cross when Jesus accomplishes, he wipes away our shame. He certainly does that. Jesus' dangers are a shame for us before God and the Father, so that in our sin, there is no longer need to be shamed before a holy God. But that doesn't mean that Jesus removes all shame over us completely. Because to follow Jesus, we should expect that there will be social shame, some dimension of shame from the world. And as much as we may want to free ourselves from that, to think that there will be no rejection or shame in following Jesus is to think just like the people that mocked Jesus. That those who are pleased by God should not suffer or face shame or rejection. And I think this is where the beauty of the cross comes. What the cross accomplishes, it allows us to embrace that shame along the sign of it in following Jesus. To kind of think about how our world tries to throw off shame, how our world tries to feel more justified and not feel ashamed of anything, it's usually a message of accept yourself, love yourself, be confident in who you are, and don't let anyone tell you anything otherwise. But if that's the case then, our social honors, so to speak, our confidence in ourselves, it's a fragile thing that stands only on our own abilities. But Jesus accomplishes here, if he wipes away any shame that we could ever have before God is following him, we don't need to feel, we're free from this need to justify ourselves socially. It frees us from the need to rid ourselves of shame before the world because we have all the honor we could ever have when the Father dies. So come what may, following Jesus' invitation to embrace scorn and shame in the world because we can cling to Christ, who pays for our shame before God and brings us that acceptance. So despite what suffering and shame may come, we can trust in the power of God in the cross. This is our next point.

And that leads us to see the confess the power of God with the centurion. See this here in the next section of Matthew, verses 45-54. Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up his spirits. Jesus was the son of God. Upon Jesus' death on the cross, we get this confession of the centurion that Jesus was the son of God. This term "son of God" has a lot of Old Testament background behind it. It can mean a lot of things, but by a large format, it refers to Jesus' divinity coming from God and his power, being God himself with the power of God. This is why, if you noticed just before, the crowds and the chief priests say mock Jesus for being the son of God because he does not have the divine power to save himself. Even earlier in the Ephesians chapter 4, we mentioned Satan uses the title to call Jesus to unlawfully exercise his divinity and power. This son of God's confession reveals the power that Jesus displayed, even in his death, surprisingly. It's curious why the centurion made this confession when he saw Jesus die. I'm trying to think about, we're told that Jesus had a great cry, a loud voice when he yielded up his spirit. It makes me think of William Wallace in "Great Hearts". Do you remember that movie when he was being executed in "Christ Freedom"? All the crowds are all before him. Maybe they have something that's going on. There's this kind of thing, the cry that Jesus gives that caused him to confess to the son of God. But more than what, even just how he dies, the centurion observes what happens around Jesus.

Matthew tells us that because of the way Jesus died and what happens, this life is centering to confess Jesus as the son of God. Now we're told he just sees the earthquake and what took place, but we're also told that these three signs that

happened at Jesus' death, I think Matthew wants us to see three signs that address or mimic the three mockings of the crowds, the chief priests, and the criminals. Just as Jesus comprehensively rejected and changed in society, Matthew shows us that Jesus comprehensively has power over all creation, standing from the heavens above with turning the temple to the earth below with the tubes and everything in between with the earthquake. That's across Jesus' displays of power about over the natural, spiritual order and even death itself. Look at these three. First the earthquake being God's power over the natural world. Earthquakes were often signs throughout the Old Testament of God's intervention. God doing something mighty in creation. It could have been a sign even of God's judgment and the coming judgment of end times of God. But in the cross, Jesus reveals his power over all life in creation, inaugurating these end times in which he now reigns over his creation and Christ is intervening to reveal the power that the cross brings. Breaking strongholds of evil, injustice, and whatever chaos that ensues in creation. He also displays power God over the spiritual order when told that the curtain tears it in two. There's some debate over which curtain this was. There were two curtains at the temple. There was the outer curtain that would have been more visible if these attorneys saw that. This is the curtain that likely divided the inner courts and the outer courts. Probably signifying that when that curtain was torn, God was inviting all people to himself in salvation, not just Jews but Gentiles as well. So maybe these Gentiles and attorneys were seeing this happen and realizing that this was the son of God because now he invites all people to come to himself. But it could also be the inner curtain, even if they would not have been able to see it. This could have been an administration of God opening up the most holy chamber of the temple, where only the high priest could enter but once a year. And yet in Christ's death, that division between God and His Holiness and all people was now dealt away with. In tearing the curtain, Jesus was breaking down the barriers between God and a man overcoming our sin that prevented us from becoming to Him. The last one told of are the two. God's power over death itself.

It's a little bit of a strange insertion here because we're told that the tomb is open, but then the bodies race after Jesus rose. You've got to wonder, did those bodies rise on Friday, on Good Friday, and then they're just kind of hanging out in the tomb waiting for Jesus to rise before they come out on Easter Sunday? Or did the tomb open and those bodies lay dead until Jesus rose on Easter Sunday? It's kind of an odd insertion. If Matthew was trying to tell us something about the resurrection, why wouldn't he just put this later in Matthew chapter 28? Why not tell us that after Jesus rose, then many other saints rose and appeared to the saints? There's a purpose here that Matthew wants to connect with the cross with His power over death itself by mentioning the tomb. Because when the tomb is open, and then Matthew tells us that eventually the death rose, in the cross Jesus began the work of conquering death by death. Jesus conquers death itself through the death of Christ, God's own Son. And so that as people come to Christ, as we come to Him, we see the power of the cross on display as the cross breaks down barriers of death. Matthew shows us that Jesus displays the power of the cross when He saves sinners who now access the God and brings us from death to new life in Him. In all throughout Matthew's Gospel, this term "Son of God," it's only used by the disciples, and it's only twice. The only two times that the disciples confess Jesus is the Son of God, and this is the very first time that it's used by an outsider, someone who's not one of the disciples.

What's even more striking is, the very people that shouldn't have seen Jesus as the Son of God, the chief priests, the religious leaders, they mock Him for being so. And the most unlikely people, the centurions of the Roman guards, confess Jesus as the Son of God. The centurions of the Roman guards, these were men employed by Rome, which meant they would have seen Caesar as the Son of God. In turn, they would have often attributed to their leader, "He is the Son of God," meaning he's endowed with the divinity of the deity's power. And so for them to completely turn the legions away from Rome and to Christ was to be an unlikely confession of Jesus as the Son of God. Even just to think about who these centurions and guards were, these were probably the very same guards that just had divided up Jesus as close when He was crucified. These were maybe even the same guards that were just a few verses earlier, beating Jesus, mocking Him, scurrying Him. Imagine all that they went through abusing Jesus and now they make a drastic turn to confess He is the Son of God. Matthew is illustrating a powerful point that in the cross, Jesus has died to bring from death to life the very people that deserve His punishment, the most unlikely of people. Even in His abusers, Jesus demonstrates the power of the cross to save any and all that come to Him. He doesn't save the heroes of the story. There are no heroes in the story except for Jesus. We can sometimes read this and try to find who are the good characters that we need to be like. And I think Matthew does attend that as we'll see, but in this point I think Matthew also wants us to remember there are no good characters on their own. And even if it were, we would not identify with them. We are all the villains that need Jesus saving. Which means as we consider the power of the cross today, any time we witness Jesus save someone, that's a demonstration of the power of the cross over the natural order, over the spiritual order and over death itself. It's a

reminder that God is still powerful to save just as He was 2,000 years ago. It's something we'll get to celebrate next week and some baptisms of brothers and sisters that will confess Jesus as the Son of God in His service.

But I'll be honest, living and ministering in San Francisco for as long as I have, there's sometimes I can forget that. Where I forget that God is still powerful to save. It can be easy to come to forget that when we go out and we live in our city of pure believer, if you do confess Jesus as the Son of God, can sometimes feel lonely that we're the few, that there aren't many out there. When we talk with non-leads around us, they would rather ridicule us and listen to us about the gospel that we hope in. But every time that we see people confess faith in Jesus, it's a reminder that God is still at work to save people to Himself. God can still save most unlikely of people who are even hostile to Him today because He saves you and me, people who were once hostile against Him. Even if you have a story where you grew up in the church, I think it's funny when people say, "Why I've been a Christian since birth." That's not really the case because even in your birth, God only distributed things to call you to Himself. God planted you in a family that brought you to this church or another church that preached the gospel, that led you to see your sin, that led you to confess God is powerful over sin. God was doing that powerfully for every step of our way. And even when we look at our salvation, it's a reminder that God is powerful over sin, even over death. So even when it seems like death is at work all around us, as this story tells us, we can confess with the century and there is still God's power to save God's power over sin and death.

And it's a reminder and a call to wait faithfully in the midst of darkness. That's our last point. The cross calls us to wait faithfully in darkness with Joseph and the women. We see this in this last account, verses 55-61. We're told in these final two groups of characters in Matthew's account of Jesus's death and burial, in Joseph and the women. And I don't think we're supposed to see that these are, like I said, heroes that are super faithful in righteousness. But I do think we're supposed to see that despite the circumstances of death and darkness reigning, they remain faithful in small ways. Joseph is an example of faithfulness in darkness. Even though we're told that other gospel accounts that, you know, Luke tells us he was a member of the Sanhedrin, a very grueling body that condemned Jesus to death. Luke tells us he didn't consent to do that. John tells us that because he was of the Sanhedrin, that Joseph and Aaron and the Theophologist were secretly because he was afraid of the Sanhedrin. By the way, he's not the most exemplary of disciples. And yet in this moment, he displays a faithfulness in his waiting. Even though he didn't know what was going to happen. He faithfully uses his own tomb to bury Jesus. Probably came to the side very costly because if he gave up his tomb for Jesus, he would have to buy a new one for himself. Or, what I think more likely is that these were family tombs. And if Jesus was buried in his tomb, that would mean Joseph would then be buried with Jesus when he was dead. Meaning that if he was a member of the Sanhedrin, Joseph would have been counted amongst the criminals when he was buried with Jesus' body.

He went to ask Pilate for the body that would have taken great courage because if Jesus really was an insurrectionist, then he would have been against the government of Rome. I don't doubt, it would have outed Joseph to his Sanhedrin tears that he has a compassion for Jesus where the rest of the Sanhedrin condemned him. Joseph was risking his likelihood, his profession as a member of the Council of Jerusalem. Probably a profession that he had led him to Jerusalem in the first place because they were told he was from Eritrea, not Jerusalem. He probably moved there when he was selected to be part of the Sanhedrin Council. Joseph was giving up so much of his likelihood and future to simply wait faithfully on Jesus. Riven told him he was a disciple by Jesus. This is a specific term our translation just made. He was a disciple of Jesus. He is now a former, but this is one of the rare instances where it's the verb form. He wasn't just a disciple of, but he was a disciple by Jesus. Probably indicating that he didn't just follow Jesus from afar, but Jesus personally had a relationship with him, discipling him as his rabbi. Regardless of what he knew was going to come, Joseph risked scorn and rejection to faithfully follow Jesus. It's a similar picture we get of the women here who wait faithfully from a distance, as he tells us. They were watching on from a distance.

Now this could be another detailed example of Jesus being alone without the women that were largely with him administering to him. But I don't think this is much about Jesus' abandonment by the women, but probably more of the women's faithfulness even in following Jesus from a distance. You see, women were not allowed to be disciples of a rabbi at the time. For the women to come close and draw near to Jesus, they even ended up scandalous to see that way, especially if their sons and husbands were not there with him as well. See, these women, even from a distance in the limitations, they were mourning and following Jesus from Galilee all the way to Jerusalem, probably being a sign, not just of their physical following of Jesus, but spiritually their posture as followers of Jesus, wherever he went. We were just

told that they were there in the darkness when Jesus varied into the tomb, and they were the first people there at the tomb at the day of resurrection, likely grieving, waiting, hoping. There's a picture that Matthew gives us that even though these women in Joseph didn't know what was going to happen, even though it almost seemed lost to them, even though it seemed like death was reigning and Jesus was gone, they still were faithful in whatever next steps that they could take, regardless of what shame and rejection it would take for them. See, Matthew reminds us that following Jesus means waiting faithfully even in the midst of darkness.

Even if we can't see the power of God at work around us, it's a reminder to hold out hope that Jesus does not leave us in darkness, because death is not the final answer. The very center of our story, we get this cry of Jesus from the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" There's a little confusion or question, "What does this mean? Was Jesus severed from the Godhead? Could it try you and God cut itself off? Is that even possible?" Regardless of theologically what's happening, we don't really know. What we do know is that in that moment, Jesus experienced the forsakenness and abandonment of the Father. And in that moment, all in the cross, in his death, he felt that God was far from him. And the only quotes, Psalm 22, the first verse, not the latter parts, which talk about the triumph of God over death and abandonment. See, in Jesus' cry at the cross, it's a reminder that while even though we may experience what feels like God's abandonment in darkness and death, because Jesus really was abandoned, we never will be by God itself. As much as it may feel like death remains around us, that we're alone in this world or this city, that maybe it feels like God's abandonment is not working anymore, the cry of the cross reminds us that regardless of our experience, the reality is that God will never leave us or forsake us. Because Jesus was abandoned by the Father, we never will be.

It reminds me of maybe a silly story, but when I think about crying out to the Father like this, feeling a sense of abandonment, maybe. And yet, knowing that God is still there even if we don't feel it. I think back to the time when I was a kid, and I was crying out for my dad, maybe seven or eight years old. And my dad was getting ready to leave the house. He was going to take me with him to his job, he looked at me, and I was leaving him by myself. And so he was getting ready, I thought I'd watch a tea show while I'm waiting. Eventually he was ready and said, "Are you just going to leave the house?" He was like, "No, I want to finish my tea show." And being the genius parent that my dad was, he said, "Okay, fine, I'll be here." And I called his love and said, "All right, leave them. I'm going to stay and watch my tea show." Remember, I'm only seven or eight. Don't call Travel Tech Services on my dad, he's a great dad. And he left the house. Now, I didn't really think much of it because I was locked into my tea show. But as soon as the show was over, five minutes later, I realized what had happened. My dad abandoned it. He left a seven-year-old boy at home by himself. And I didn't have any young child to do my instincts. I ran to the window, threw it open, started screaming for my dad. Dad, daddy, come back! His car was already gone out of the driveway. What felt like maybe hours to me was probably only five minutes. But my dad came, driving and pulling him back into the driveway, and then running into the house to get me. And in my moment of need, I felt abandoned by my dad. But you know what else I felt? I thought, "Man, it worked." My cry dropped my head back. Now, I can't wait to realize that I was just tactic to try to teach me a lesson. You just drove around the block knowing that I'm crying out for him and came right back.

But I think that's an illustration of how we can sometimes feel in the midst of darkness. We can sometimes feel and see like God's absence. We can sometimes think if we may look around and think, "Our father's gone." He's collapsed into our own in this world, and he's just jumped ship. But when they seem like abandonment on our parts, it's part of the good plan of our father. He still cares. He still hears. He still magically will hear our cries, and he will come back for us. Now he calls us to wait patiently and faithfully in the midst of that darkness, knowing that the cross is our assurance, that because Jesus did cry abandonment in our cries, we know we have a father that hears us, regardless of what it may seem. And so we pulled out hope for the power of the cross. Something we'll talk about this week and the whole week next Friday, good Friday, and certainly on Easter Sunday.