

MBC - 11/11/2018 - Pastor Doug Thompson
"The Crucifixion of Christ"
Matthew 27:26-44

We finally come to the cross this morning. Everything in our 8 year study of Matthew's Gospel, has led to this. The cross of Christ is the mountain peak of all of Scripture, and human history. The Scottish preacher, Alexander MacLaren, said: "Christ and His sufferings are the centre of the world's history, to which all that went before points, from which all that follows after flows."

The whole drama of the universe comes together at the cross: Death and life, hate and love, violence and peace, guilt and forgiveness, sin and purity, brokenness and wholeness, destruction and restoration, defeat and victory. On the cross, what Adam lost by his sin is restored by Christ's obedience.

As we read our passage see how it shows how much God hates our sins, but how much He loves His people to do this to His own Son so that we can be children of God.

- Matthew 27:26-44 ²⁶Then he released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, delivered him to be crucified. ²⁷Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor's headquarters, and they gathered the whole battalion before him. ²⁸And they stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, ²⁹and 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!" ³⁰And they spit on him and took the reed and struck him on the head. ³¹And 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. ³²As they went out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name. They compelled this man to carry his cross. ³³And when they came to a place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull), ³⁴they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall, but when he tasted it, he would not drink it. ³⁵And when they had crucified him, they divided his garments among them by casting lots. ³⁶Then they sat down and kept watch over him there. ³⁷And over his head they put the charge against him, which read, "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews." ³⁸Then two robbers were crucified with him, one on the right and one on the left. ³⁹And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads ⁴⁰and 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." ⁴¹So 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. ⁴³He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him. For he said, 'I am the Son of God.'" ⁴⁴And the robbers who were crucified with him also reviled him in the same way.

Intro -

Crucifixion goes back to the Persians who devised this as a way to prolong death until the maximum pain had been inflicted. A person could suffer on a cross for days before dying. When the Romans finally picked it up, it was such a horrible thing that it was reserved only for foreigners or slaves convicted of murder, or rebellion. No Roman citizen would ever be crucified--*But this is the death that Jesus died.*

The Roman orator, Cicero, said that crucifixion was "a most cruel and disgusting crime. . . to bind a Roman citizen is a crime, to flog him is an abomination, to kill him is almost an act of murder; to crucify him is--what? There is no fitting word that can possibly describe

so horrible a deed...the very word "cross" should be far removed not only from the person of a Roman citizen, but from his thoughts, his eyes and his ears. For . . . even the mere mention is unworthy of a Roman citizen and a free man." *But this is the death that Jesus died.*

It was *the* most dreaded death in the ancient world. About 100 years before Jesus, the Romans captured 6,000 slaves who revolted under Spartacus and crucified them along the Appian Way. In 4 B.C., the Roman General Varus crucified 2,000 Jews knowing that Dt.21:23 says, "*cursed is anyone who is hanged on a tree.*" So the idea that their glorious Messiah would die in this degrading, disgusting way was an abomination to the Jews. It still is. *But this is the death that Jesus died.*

A few years ago archaeologists found a drawing from the 2nd century in a building where imperial pages were trained, and it's a drawing mocking one of these young men who was a Christian. He has his arm outstretched toward a man on the cross with the head of a donkey. The inscription scribbled underneath says, "Alexamenos worships his God."

A donkey on a cross, that's what the world thought of Jesus' crucifixion. It was offensive, degrading, and insulting. But this is the death that our Jesus died for our salvation.

And hearing the message of the cross - can bring salvation. So let's look at it this morning. And I pray that we see Jesus.

I. The flogging.

So when we put together all the Gospel accounts, it's shocking what Jesus endured. Think about the emotional strain alone: After a dramatic week, an intensely emotional night with His Disciples, an agonizing time in prayer in which He was so stressed that He sweat drops of blood - and remember that Peter, James, and John literally couldn't stay awake—

He was betrayed by one of His own, kept up all night through 3 trials, then mocked, slapped, and spit upon. This is all before the real physical torture began. And even before the scourging that Matthew mentions in v.26, John brings up something else—

- John 19:1 ¹Then Pilate took Jesus and flogged him.

This was before Pilate had sentenced Jesus to be crucified, and it's not the same word as "scourging." This is the word that meant a "caning."

- Some of you remember Michael Fay, a 19 year old American kid who vandalized a car over in Singapore in 1994. He was sentenced to be hit with a half inch thick cane 4 times - after the first whack he yelled out that he was dying! But he walked away from it, and the next day he was doing push-ups. It didn't kill him! But after all He had been through, Jesus was hit many more than 4 times. And this was just the beginning.

II. The scourging.

The purpose of the scourging was basically to shorten the time the person was on the cross by almost killing them beforehand. And the scourging alone was often fatal.

- The Roman scourge was what we would call the cat o' nine tails: a short wooden handle with leather straps attached, and at the end of each leather strap was a piece of glass, bone, or lead. The victim was stripped naked, tied to a post by his wrists with his feet off the ground, so his skin would be taut; then the scourging began as the lash

was wrapped around the person and then torn off so that the glass and bone would rip the flesh, then the muscle, and even into the internal organs, veins, and arteries.

Jesus survived the scourging, but was bleeding profusely, in terrible pain, and in shock. And all of this was predicted beforehand—

- Isaiah 53:5 He was crushed for our iniquities; upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with His wounds we are healed.

And then He was turned over to the Roman soldiers.

III. The humiliation by the Roman soldiers.

- Matthew 27:27-31 ²⁷Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor's headquarters, and they gathered *the whole battalion* before him. (600 coarse, brutal, cruel, Jew-hating soldiers, who were ready to have some fun with this 'king of the Jews.')
- ²⁸And they stripped him (stop there)

To the Jews of Jesus' day, nothing was more embarrassing and shameful than to have your nakedness exposed. This is our sinless Jesus, who was always sensitive to others, humble and modest - and they tear off all His clothes, which were soaked with blood, stuck to His body, so it was like ripping a bandage off His skin that was hanging in ribbons after the scourging. Think of the pain.

- and put a scarlet robe on him,

They thought of a game to play with this prisoner: "Mock the phony king." So they took one of the soldiers dirty tunics and put it on this king.

- ²⁹and 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!" ³⁰And they spit on him. . .

To be spit on by a Gentile was the ultimate insult and humiliation for a Jew - and this is God's own Son. He's taking all of this for you.

- and took the reed and struck him on the head. (So they are pounding the thorns into His scalp, and you know they were laughing until they had tears in their eyes.) ³¹And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the robe (tearing off more skin) and put his own clothes on him and led him away to crucify him.

Victims were usually made to wear a placard around their neck with their crime on it as they were paraded down the street to the place of crucifixion - you understand that all of this was to serve as a warning and a deterrent to the public not to repeat these crimes. So the sign they later placed above Jesus' cross was hung around His neck: "*King of the Jews!*" in Greek, Latin, and Hebrew - so all the world could read it.

IV. Carrying the cross.

What a pitiful sight Jesus was, covered in blood, so weak and tired, in a daze by now. His muscles were spasming, He was dehydrated, cold; in shock from losing so much blood. And

they also are forcing Him to carry the crossbeam - the *patibulum* - of His own cross that weighed more than 100 pounds. That was just another way to shame the victim and strike more terror into their hearts. But Jesus is so weak, that He can't even do it—

- Matthew 27:32 ³²As they went out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name. They compelled this man to carry his cross.

These soldiers weren't being merciful to Jesus - they just didn't want Him to die before He could be crucified! But they weren't going to carry this loser's cross, so they conscripted a man named Simon from Libya, probably a Jew who had come for the Passover. They forced him to carry Jesus' crossbeam - he didn't have a choice. And actually, this is just the kind of thing Jesus had in mind in the Sermon on the Mt. when He said, "*If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.*"

I believe this whole experience brought Simon to Christ. In Mark 15:21, Mark says that Simon was "the father of Alexander and Rufus," which indicates that Christians reading his Gospel knew who these fellow believers. And in—

- Romans 16:13 Paul says, ¹³Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord; also his mother, who has been a mother to me as well. - so this would have been Simon's wife, and one of his sons.

The question is: where were Jesus' own Disciples? The ones He had told to take up their own cross and follow Him? They're no where to be found. So Jesus is alone, hardly able to walk to His own crucifixion. He's now following His cross to Golgotha, the place of the Skull. Janice and I have been there, and there is a rock formation that looks like a skull - it's an eerie place. By the way, the Latin for Golgotha is "Calvary."

V. Outside the camp.

And we skipped over something that is very important. Look at v.32: "*As they went out.*" Out of where? Out of Jerusalem, out of the city. He couldn't die inside the city because He going to die as a sacrifice for our sins. Listen—

- Exodus 29:14 ⁴But the flesh of the bull and its skin and its dung you shall burn with fire *outside the camp*; it is a sin offering.
- Leviticus 16:27 ²⁷And the bull for the sin offering and the goat for the sin offering, whose blood was brought in to make atonement in the Holy Place, shall be carried outside the camp. Their skin and their flesh and their dung shall be burned up with fire.

The Old Testament sin offerings were taken *outside the camp*, away from the people, away from civilized society - and completely consumed with fire. They were considered to be unclean because the sins of the people had been transferred to them. They were "*cursed*" and set apart for *destruction*. There was nothing on earth more disgusting and despised than those animal carcasses. They had to be taken out of people's sight, outside the city walls and burned. Now look with me at what the writer of Hebrews says:

- Hebrews 13:11-12 ¹¹For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the holy places by the high priest as a sacrifice for sin are burned outside the camp. ¹²So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood.

Do you see what he's saying? To take away our sins, Jesus was treated as accursed, unclean, utterly rejected by God and man; taken outside the city and consumed by the wrath of God. Isaiah said that He would be: "*despised and forsaken of men...like one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we did not esteem Him*" He was taken outside the city and devoted to destruction because the sins of His people had been *transferred* onto Him! This is what our Jesus went through for us! And look at the application for us—

- Hebrews 13:13-14 ¹³Therefore let us go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured. ¹⁴For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come.

VI. Wine mixed with gall.

- Matthew 27:33-34 ³³And when they came to a place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull), ³⁴they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall, but when he tasted it, he would not drink it.

Jesus was dying of thirst by now, "*My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to my jaws*" (Ps.22.15) So the soldiers decided to play another joke on Jesus, by offering Him wine mixed with gall which was so bitter that as soon as He tasted it, He couldn't drink it. Gall is also poisonous. It's hard to imagine how cruel they were.

- Now Mark says that it was wine mixed with myrrh, and you often hear it said that myrrh is a painkiller and this was a custom to give this to victims of crucifixion to numb their pain - Jesus refused it because He wanted to face the cross unimpaired.

I think this interpretation is wrong. If this was a custom, then why did Jesus have to taste it to know what it was, if He knew He would refuse it? And at least one expert I read said that myrrh has no effect on pain - and myrrh is extremely bitter too, so this wasn't an act of compassion, it was one more act of cruelty on a dying Man. It was myrrh mixed with wine - Matthew calls it *gall* to describe its bitterness. Now look ahead at—

- Matthew 27:48 ⁴⁸And one of them at once ran and took a sponge, filled it with sour wine - (this would have been diluted wine vinegar which was the staple drink of Roman soldiers) - and put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink.

And this was an act of mercy. So twice Jesus was offered something to drink, and this is exactly what David predicted—

- Psalm 69:20-21 ²⁰Reproaches have broken my heart, so that I am in despair. I looked for pity, but there was none, and for comforters, but I found none. ²¹They gave me poison for food (first drink), and for my thirst they gave me sour wine to drink (second drink).

VII. Crucifixion.

- Matthew 27:35 ³⁵And when they had crucified him. . .

It's interesting how discreet the Gospel writers are about Jesus' actual crucifixion - they spare us the details, but it was real, and it was horrible almost beyond what we can imagine—

To begin with, Jesus was stripped naked again - He wasn't wearing any sort of loincloth like you see in the paintings - and made to lie on His bleeding back in the dirt while they nailed thick spikes through His wrists and then hoisted the cross-beam up onto the vertical post of the cross that was already in the ground. Then they nailed the spikes through His feet. The

pain of hanging on a cross was *excruciating* (that's where the word comes from) as His bones were slowly pulled out of their sockets and He struggled to push Himself up on the spikes to breathe.

- Psalm 22:14 ¹⁴I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted within my breast;

His bleeding, lacerated back moves up and down against the rough wood as He tries to breathe.

Let me read: "Then another agony begins: a deep crushing pain deep in the chest, as the pericardium slowly fills with serum and begins to compress the heart. It is now almost over - the loss of tissue fluids has reached a critical level. The compressed heart is struggling to pump heavy, thick, sluggish blood into the tissues. The tortured lungs are making a frantic effort to gasp in small gulps of air.

"The unnatural position made every movement painful; the lacerated veins and crushed tendons throbbed with incessant anguish; the wounds inflamed by exposure, gradually gangrened; the arteries - especially at the head and stomach - became swollen and oppressed with surcharged blood; and while each variety of misery went on gradually increasing, there was added to them the intolerable pang of a burning and raging thirst; and all these physical complications caused an internal excitement and anxiety, which made the prospect of death itself - of death, the unknown enemy, at whose approach man usually shudders most - bear the aspect of a delicious and exquisite release."

Death usually came from suffocation because the victim couldn't lift himself up to breathe and suffocated - you remember in John's Gospel, that the Jews asked Pilate to break the legs of the three men so that they would finally die of suffocation because they didn't want those gross bodies hanging there on the Sabbath! But Jesus was already dead.

VIII. More humiliation.

I can hardly stand to read this, you can hardly stand to hear it, but imagine being there and witnessing what these 3 human beings were going through. And then we read this—

- Matthew 27:35-37 ³⁵And when they had crucified him, they divided his garments among them by casting lots.

These soldiers are drawing straws to see who gets Jesus' robe! Just another game to them: "Who will get the dead king's stuff?" Unbelievable. But again, David said 1,000 years before it happened—

- Psalm 22:18 ¹⁸they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.
- ³⁶Then they sat down and kept watch over him there. (Why, so His brave Disciples wouldn't come and rescue Him? That wasn't going to happen.) ³⁷And over his head they put the charge against him, which read, "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews."

John says this—

- John 19:20-22 Many of the Jews read this inscription, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and it was written in Aramaic, in Latin, and in Greek. ²¹So

the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, “Do not write, ‘The King of the Jews,’ but rather, ‘This man *said*, I am King of the Jews.’” (And by now, Pilate was through with these Jews nagging him:) ²²Pilate answered, “What I have written I have written.” Here is your King of the Jews - you deserve Him!

IX. Three crosses.

- Matthew 27:38 ³⁸Then two robbers were crucified with him, one on the right and one on the left.

To everyone looking at those three crosses, they just saw an interesting irony: This peaceful, innocent Man who claimed to be the Messiah and Son of God is crucified with two freedom fighter murderers. It should have been Jesus Barabbas there instead, right? What in interesting series of coincidences led to this!

But it was the perfect plan of God to display to the world that Jesus came to identify with sinners, even in His death. He became one of us to die for us. Remember His baptism by John at the Jordan three years earlier? The one Man who never sinned, but He went down in the water to identify with the people He came to save. And Isaiah predicted this—

- Isaiah 53:12 ¹²Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors.

And Jesus actually did that for that one man hanging on the cross beside Him, didn't He? And the humiliation and mocking never let up—

- Matthew 27:39-44 ³⁹And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads ⁴⁰and 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.” ⁴¹So 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. ⁴³He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him. For he said, ‘I am the Son of God.’” ⁴⁴And the robbers who were crucified with him also reviled him in the same way.

Just what David prophesied about Jesus—

- Psalm 22:6-8 ⁶But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by mankind and despised by the people. ⁷All who see me mock me; they make mouths at me; they wag their heads; ⁸“He trusts in the LORD; let him deliver him; let him rescue him, for he delights in him!”

Did they hear what they were saying to Jesus? Did they recognize David's words in their own? This was such a victory for these false shepherds. Now, they thought, everyone could see what a loser this false Messiah was. When the chips are down, He has no power, He can't even save Himself, let alone others.

They are so fixated on proving to all the people that Jesus isn't their Messiah, but they are actually proving that He is, by fulfilling the Scriptures about the Messiah!

- And look at the end of v.40: “If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross!” Doesn't that ring a bell? Satan said exactly the same thing when he tempted Jesus in

the wilderness: “If you really are the Son of God. . . !” I believe Satan was in that crowd, in those people, shouting out at Jesus. And I believe that Satan and all his demons were ecstatic - high fives all around. This was their finest hour. Or so they thought.

But let me show you how three amazing things that happened as Jesus was on the cross—

1.) In v.40—the crowd proclaimed Jesus’ resurrection—

- Matthew 27:40 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.”

Remember this charge? Remember how they distorted what Jesus had actually said back in John 2? He was talking about His own resurrection, which would happen in just three days and prove that He is indeed the Son of God! John said—

- John 2:22 ²²When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

And this crowd was reminding everyone of Jesus’ prediction of His resurrection! I wonder, when that tomb was found empty, how many in the crowd who had shouted this out to mock Jesus, said to themselves, “What have we done?” And maybe some of them also “*believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.*”

2.) In v. 42, the chief priests, scribes, and elders proclaimed substitutionary atonement—

- Matthew 27:42 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.

What they said was absolutely true: He *did* save others. And because He was saving others, He *couldn't* save Himself. Jesus had to stay on that cross until He accomplished the salvation of His people. He stayed there for you and me! Here these cruel false shepherds were mocking Him and calling Him impotent because He wouldn't save Himself. But if He had, there would be no salvation for you and me.

He did save others, He could not save Himself, and He was the King of Israel! Everything they said to mock Jesus, was true!

What was *not* true was that if He had come down, they would have believed Him. Not even His resurrection convinced them. If these men wouldn't believe God's written Word, and His Incarnate Word - no miracle would have made them believers.

3.) Jesus was saving sinners while being crucified.

- Matthew 27:44 ⁴⁴And the robbers who were crucified with him also reviled him in the same way.

These were Barabbas' friends - co-terrorists and murderers, both of them cursing Jesus just as bitterly as all the rest. But we know the rest of the story, that one of those men had a complete turnaround - Gk. *epistrepho* = conversion, while they were both hanging on crosses, suffering indescribable pain. While this man was having his worst day ever, he put his faith in

Jesus and was saved. And Jesus gave him assurance on the spot that when he breathed his last breath, he would join Jesus in Paradise - the one that can't burn.

- There's just no earthly way to explain that. No one preached an evangelistic sermon to this man. No one we know of was at the foot of the cross praying for him. I'll tell you what it was, it was the power of Jesus that saved this Man.

Jesus was at His absolute weakest, He had never looked so repulsive - but this man watched Him going through the same torture he was going through: He never sinned. He didn't curse His executors like this man and his friend did. Jesus didn't defend Himself, He didn't even complain. And while being mocked and humiliated, he heard words come out of Jesus' lips that were unbelievable: "Father, forgive them. They don't know what they are doing!"

Maybe that is the word that God used to break his hard heart, and let the light of the Gospel in: While the crowd was shouting out, "He saved others!" this man thought, "Then He can save me too! Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom!"

And Jesus said, "*Truly (amen), I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise!*"

Jesus saved that man - without baptism, church membership - that man didn't put in one hour of Christian service. How can Jesus do that? He can do that because *Jesus saves!*

- Ephesians 2:8-9 ⁸For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

If Jesus could and would save such a wretched man as that in his dying hour, he can save you this morning. And if He could save a man like that while on earth, dying on a cross beside Him, how much more He can save you now that He has been raised and seated at God's right hand!

- 1 Corinthians 1:18 ¹⁸For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

He is able, He is willing, doubt no more! Just believe!