

Opening Prayer: Gracious Heavenly Father, we commit this time of worship to you. Help us bow our hearts and focus our minds on the cross, where your Son willingly took our place as sinners so that all who believe in him by faith can be redeemed and restored. Because ***he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds, we are healed*** now and forever. ***Amen.***

Introduction: Take your Bibles and open them up to Matthew 27, and we will study verses 32-44. The message is titled ***The Crucifixion of the King***. What is the first thing that comes to mind when you think of the cross? As evangelicals, we tend to view it as a symbol of victory, where Christ conquered sin and death. That is partly true, but throughout his earthly ministry, Jesus saw the cross as a place where he would suffer and die.

Our Lord's final passion prediction came in Matthew chapter 20:19, where he takes his disciples aside privately and tells them ***the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified.***

In the last few chapters of Matthew's gospel, we have seen these events foretold by Jesus being fulfilled before our very eyes. Evidence that God is working out his redemptive purposes for humanity through his son. Today, as we look at Jesus on the cross, we will see Christ take one step closer to securing our salvation for eternity. ***That brings me to the first point:***

I. First Point: The Crucifixion of Christ (vv. 32-38): Follow along as I read verses 32 through 38. ***³² As they went out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name. They compelled this man to carry his cross. ³³ And when they came to a place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull), ³⁴ they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall, but when he tasted it, he would not drink it. ³⁵ And when they had crucified him, they divided his garments among them by casting lots. ³⁶ Then they sat down and kept watch over him there. ³⁷ And over his head they put the charge against him, which read, "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews." ³⁸ Then two robbers were crucified with him, one on the right and one on the left.***

A. The Cross is Carried for the King (v.32): After the unjust conviction before Pilate and the severe mistreatment of our Lord by the Roman soldiers, Jesus and a

band of guards **went out** from the governor's headquarters into the streets of Jerusalem that are flooded with Jewish pilgrims who are there to celebrate the Passover. As was the Roman custom, the victim to be crucified was responsible for carrying their cross, and this was meant to heap shame on the victim. On Jesus' shoulder is the rugged wooden beam he will soon shed his blood on.

Remember, the last 24 hours of Jesus' life have been grueling. He has been betrayed by his friends, arrested without cause, and endured six separate trials and verbal and physical abuse from the Jews and the Romans. His body is weak, and under the weight of the cross, his knees begin to buckle from fatigue. It is the pinnacle of Christ's humanity.

Realizing that Jesus can't go on, the Roman guards lock eyes on a man in the crowd named **Simon**, who hails from **Cyrene**, a town in Northern Africa. Most likely, he journeyed to Jerusalem to worship the God of Israel. We are not told exactly why the Roman guards single him out, but the soldiers **compelled** Simon to take the cross from the hands of Christ and carry it for him.

Mark's account adds that Simon was the father of Alexander and Rufus (**Mk. 15:21**), who later became two well-known men in the early church. Their dad's unexpected encounter with Jesus eventually led to him and his son's bowing their knees to the Lordship of Jesus.

Simon gives us our first lesson in discipleship even though he wasn't a follower of Jesus yet. He shows us what it means in the face of our enemies to take up the cross given to us by Christ and carry it wherever our Lord leads us. Do you see your cross as a privilege to bear or a burden to shed?

B. The Crucified King (vv.33- 36): The journey from Jerusalem to Golgotha was almost two miles long. Walking westward through the Via Dolorosa, Jesus is getting weaker and weaker. The Romans intentionally paraded their victims through the busiest streets to humiliate them. The crowds would have taken advantage of this by hurling insults and spitting upon our Lord, but nothing will stand in his way of finishing his work on the cross.

Outside the gates of Jerusalem, they come to **the place of a skull**. It is named that because of its shape.

The Romans strategically chose this location because it was next to the main road that went into Jerusalem, so on any given day, you could walk by and witness a crucifixion. This served as a warning to anyone who wanted to challenge the Roman authorities that if you did, death awaited!

Once they arrived at ***Golgotha, they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall.***

Gall was a narcotic meant to numb the senses of the person being crucified.

When ***he tasted it***, Jesus realized what they were trying to do, so he refused to drink. It would have given him temporary relief, which most people would have welcomed, but the Lord chose to bear the pain of crucifixion fully sober.

Even though Jesus didn't drink from the cup of wine, the guards offered him. He is drinking from the cup of suffering set before him by his heavenly Father. Each of us has the same cup, and sometimes it will be empty, half full, or running over. Suffering is one way God sanctifies us molding us into the disciples he wants us to be. Our comfort is that one day we will drink from the cup of glory in the presence of Jesus. I hope you can already taste it.

In verse 35, it says ***they crucified him***. Like the other gospel writers, Matthew does not go into detail explaining the crucifixion. The original audience would have been familiar with how our glorious Savior died. Outside of extrabiblical resources and movies like *The Passion of the Christ*, we wouldn't fully understand the horror of crucifixion.

Listen intently to this excerpt from the book of *Life of Christ* by Frederick Farrar as he describes the crucifixion: *A death by crucifixion seems to include all that pain and death can have of the horrible and ghastly – dizziness, cramps, thirst, starvation, sleeplessness, traumatic fever, shame, publicity of shame, long continuance of torment, horror of anticipation, mortification of intended wounds – all intensified just up to the point at which they can be endured at all, but all stopping just short of the point at which would give to the sufferer the relief of unconsciousness.* ***He continues.***

One thing is clear. The first-century executions were not like the modern ones, for they did not seek a quick, painless death nor the preservation of any measure of dignity for the criminal. On the contrary, they sought agonizing torture, which completely humiliated him. And it is important that we understand this, for it helps us realize the agony of Christ's death.

Once the guards arrived at Golgotha, Jesus would have been thrown to the ground on his back and his outstretched arms placed on the horizontal cross-beam. The long sharp nails would have been driven through right below his hands into the wood. If you listen close enough, you can hear the pounding of the hammer, and with each strike, there is a scream.

With Christ attached to the cross beam, he would have been hoisted up, and the final act of cruelty was to nail his feet to the vertical stake in the ground. Such is the picture of our great God and Savior, the lamb slain before the foundation of the world, patiently enduring a criminal's death for you and me.

While our Lord hangs from the cross, struggling to breathe, his naked body is exposed to the elements and insects. The four guards below him are gambling for Jesus' clothes, unaware they are fulfilling King David's words from Psalm 22:18, ***they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing, they cast lots.*** Under Roman Law, the executioners were allowed to have "***trophies***" from their victims. To make sure that nobody tries to rescue Jesus from his imminent death, the guards ***sat down and kept watch over him there.***

C. The Charge Against the King (vv.37-38): To insult the Jews and broadcast the "crime" that Jesus committed, Pilate had the soldiers put a sign above Jesus' head on the cross, and when you take all the gospel accounts together, it reads, ***Jesus the Nazarene, the King of the Jews.*** In the remaining hours of Jesus' earthly life, he will die between two criminals, fulfilling the words spoken by Isaiah hundreds of years earlier. ***He was numbered among the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors.***

The greatest exchange in human history is taking place on the cross. The righteousness for the unrighteous, death for life, slave for free. The debt that we all owe God because of our sin has been paid in full by Jesus' work upon the tree.

So much of the evangelical world today is made up of a cross-less Christ and Christianity, but the Bible knows no such thing. In ***Matthew 16:24***, our marching orders have been given to us, and they haven't changed, for our God is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Our charge is to pick up our crosses daily and follow him. This means we must be committed to him even when it costs us our comfort, friends, careers, and possibly our lives. I hope you glory in the fact that Jesus has counted you worthy to be his disciple.

That brings me to the second point:

II. Second Point: The Crowd of Condemnation (vv. 39-44): Follow along as I read verses 39 through 44. ³⁹ ***And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads*** ⁴⁰ ***and 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.”*** ⁴¹ ***So 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.”*** ⁴³ ***He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him. For he said, ‘I am the Son of God.’”*** ⁴⁴ ***And the robbers who were crucified with him also reviled him in the same way.***

These remaining verses show a great contrast between God’s love and man’s wickedness. Matthew shows us that by highlighting the three different types of people at the foot of the cross to humiliate Jesus in the final hours of his life. Bible commentator RVG Tasker rightly summarizes them.

A. Ignorant Sinners (vv. 39-40): In verses 39 and 40, you have the ***Ignorant Sinners***. They are demonstrating what we would call a “mob mentality” because Matthew describes them as ***those who passed by*** and saw Jesus on the cross with a sign above him claiming to be royalty. They think he wouldn’t be on that cross if he were a true king. So, they ***derided him*** by continually hurling insults at him, and their disdain for the Lord of Glory is demonstrated by them ***wagging their heads*** at him.

Their ignorance of who Jesus truly is seen by them regurgitating the false charges brought against Christ by the Sanhedrin in ***Matthew 26:61; this man said, ‘I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to rebuild it in three days,*** where Jesus’ words from John chapter 2 were ripped entirely out of context to condemn him.

Some people today make false claims about Jesus and Christianity all the time. Nine times out of ten, they repeat what they have heard someone else say. “*You can’t trust the Bible because it has been translated so many times.*” “*Jesus never claimed to be God.*” “*The church is full of hypocrites.*” And the list goes on and on.

When the Lord gives you an open door, be the salt and light to bring a word of correction in truth and love to the ignorant sinners in this world.

The Scriptures demand that we respond to these objections. Peter exhorts you, **but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect (1st Peter 3:15).**

B. Religious Sinners (vv. 41-43): You have the **Religious Sinners** in verses 41 to 43. There in the crowd are the members of the **Sanhedrin**, the Jewish Supreme court comprised of the **chief priests**, **elders**, and **scribes**. From the lips of these leaders, they **mocked** Christ testifying to his divine power and declaring that **he saved others**. They were witnesses to his miracles and instead of throwing themselves at the feet of Jesus.

They chose the broad path of self-righteousness that leads to destruction because they wanted a different Jesus. Like so many people today. **In November of 2022, a seminary student in England, Joshua Heath, delivered a sermon claiming that Jesus had a “transgender body.” To add insult to injury, the college dean defended the student.** This shouldn’t surprise us because the pseudo-religious leaders of our day want a Jesus who panders to the culture’s desires. Instead of a Jesus who calls sinners to repentance.

We’re not insulated from this as churches in our community drift further away from the Bible. We must keep up the good fight as soldiers for Jesus Christ, be unified as a body, and keep God’s word central to everything we do.

C. Condemned Sinners (v.44): After the ignorant and religious sinners heap condemnation on Jesus. In verse 44, the **Condemned Sinners** join in. The two men **crucified** on either side of our Lord begin to revile **him in the same way**, spewing blasphemous insults at the Son of God. Luke adds that one of the thieves taunts Jesus, **are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!**

Whether or not we want to admit that before we came to Jesus Christ, every one of us was a condemned sinner on the highway to hell. But out of God’s graciousness, love, and mercy, he provided his Son for you and me. Through the work of the Holy Spirit, the other thief on the cross repented of his sin before it was too late, **and he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” And he said to him, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.”** If you still have breath in your lungs, praise God for that because the door of salvation is still open for you.

1. **In closing,** I want to leave you with three brief application points—the Three R's. **The first application point is Revile.** *It is no secret that this world is hostile to Christianity. In the face of opposition, when we are reviled for our faith, we are to show compassion to the lost, just like our Lord did from the cross.*

2. **The second application point is Ransom.** *Before we came to Christ, we were blindfolded and kidnapped by sin, Satan, and death. God gave his son over to pay the ransom so you and I could be redeemed. The next time you think about sinning or disobeying the Lord consider what it cost him to save you!*

3. **The third application point is Receive.** *Contrary to what the world might say, the thieves on the cross show us that they are only two types of people: those who revile and reject God's one and only son and those who repent and receive him by faith. Which one are you?* **Let's pray.**