

Our Savior

Matthew 27:27-32, 45-54

FIRST THOUGHTS

As you study this final session from Matthew, spend time quietly reflecting on the agony Jesus experienced for humanity. Ask Him to help you avoid taking His finished work on the cross for granted. And identify ways you can deepen your understanding that Jesus endured everything on the cross so that we could have access to God.

UNDERSTANDING THE CONTEXT

When they arrived at Gethsemane, Jesus prayed while His exhausted disciples dozed. Soon, Judas arrived with an armed mob sent by the religious leaders (Matt. 26:47). After arresting Jesus, they took Him to Annas, the former high priest. While still night, Jesus stood before Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin, where witnesses made false accusations against Him (Matt. 26:57–68). Meanwhile, Peter, who had entered the high priest’s courtyard, denied knowing Jesus when confronted by others (vv. 69-75).

KEY DOCTRINE

Salvation

Faith is the acceptance of Jesus Christ and commitment of the entire personality to Him as Lord and Savior. (See John 1:12–13; Titus 2:14.)

Attempting to release Jesus, Pilate offered to free either Barabbas, a convicted murderer, or Jesus. Sure that the crowd would pick Jesus, Pilate was shocked when they chose Barabbas and called for Jesus’s death (Matt. 27:15–26; Mark 15:6–15). Pilate made one final attempt to release Jesus, thinking that scourging Jesus would satisfy the Jews (Luke 23:22; John 19:12). Eventually, though, Pilate washed his hands of the whole affair and turned Jesus over to his soldiers for crucifixion (Matt. 27:24–26).

MOCKED (MATTHEW 27:27-31)

Since Jesus had been found guilty of claiming royalty, the soldiers mocked Him as such. ***They stripped him***, a shameful thing for a Jew. Then, they dressed Him in ***a scarlet robe***. The word *robe* specifically referred to a military cloak worn by officers. Since every king needed a crown, the soldiers ***twisted together a crown of thorns*** and ***put it on his head***.

Matthew also was the only Gospel writer to mention that ***they knelt down before him***. To mock Him further, they shouted, ***Hail, king of the Jews!*** *Hail* parodies the formal address of greeting for royalty. For example, the Romans greeted the emperor with, “Hail, Caesar!” Pilate had asked Jesus if He were the King of the Jews (Matt. 27:11), and that charge was posted above Jesus’s head at the cross (Matt. 27:37). Little did these soldiers know that their mockery contained profound truths about Jesus.

Eventually, the Romans dropped all pretense and focused on abusing and humiliating Jesus. ***They spat on him***, showing great contempt in a culture where honor was valued highly. They also ***kept hitting him on the head*** with the “scepter.” The imperfect tense of the verb shows the repeated nature of this action. Any thorns pointing inward were driven deeper into Jesus’s head. The spitting and repeated blows fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah 50:6 and recalls the treatment of Jesus by the Sanhedrin in Matthew 26:67–68. All of this fulfilled Jesus’s prediction in Matthew 20:19 and Isaiah’s prophecy in Isaiah 53:7–8.

Completing their ridicule, the Romans ***stripped*** Jesus of the robe and ***put his own clothes on him***. Then the execution squad, usually four soldiers and a centurion, ***led him away***. As a final shaming, criminals usually were left naked when led to their execution site. That they put Jesus’s clothes back on Him may have been a concession to Jewish scruples—especially at Passover. Verse 35 records that Jesus’s clothes were again removed at the cross, as the soldiers gambled for them.

FORSAKEN (MATTHEW 27:45-49)

Supernatural events accompanied Jesus's crucifixion. For example, **darkness came over the whole land** during the brightest hours of the day. **From noon until three in the afternoon**, the region went dark. *The whole land* probably refers to Jerusalem and Judea, or perhaps to all of Israel. Some skeptics have suggested the darkness was the result of an eclipse. However, Passover always involves a full moon, and an eclipse can occur only during a new moon. But the darkness had deeper meaning. During this time, God dealt with human sin and the atoning sacrifice for it. Figuratively speaking, God, who is too holy to look on sin (Hab. 1:13), turned His back on the sin-bearer (Isa. 53:5,10).

Jesus's cry of **Elí, Elí, lemá sabachtháni** represents the first words of Jesus recorded by Matthew since His reply to Pilate in 27:11. Significantly, Jesus uttered this prayer **about three in the afternoon**, the exact time for the afternoon Jewish prayers (Acts 3:1; 10:3). The words come directly from Psalm 22:1; and, as recorded by Matthew, are partly in Hebrew and partly in Aramaic. Matthew provided the translation, **My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?** The Psalm goes on to answer why this abandonment was necessary: "You are holy" (Ps. 22:3). That **Jesus cried out with a loud voice** indicates that He meant His words to be heard. Since this is the only one of Jesus's seven cries from the cross that he recorded, we can assume it was significant to Matthew as well.

In its original language, Jesus's loud cry sounds like the name **Elijah**, the prophet who was taken to heaven in a whirlwind (2 Kings 2:11) and was predicted to return before the end of time (Mal. 4:5–6). We don't know if **heard this** referred to Jewish bystanders or the Gentile soldiers. Likewise, we don't know who filled the sponge **with sour wine, put it on a stick, and offered him a drink**. A sponge was a standard part of a soldier's supply kit, and even the common people carried *sour wine* because it was a reliable, inexpensive thirst quencher.

SON OF GOD (MATTHEW 27:50-54)

This time, Matthew did not record Jesus's words, only that He **cried out again with a loud voice**. The statement that Jesus **gave up his spirit** points to the fact that He voluntarily gave His life. While darkness occurred as Jesus was dying, the other supernatural signs took place at His death. The curtain tearing from **top to bottom** shows this was God's doing. Also, since the curtain was torn before the earthquake, it did not cause the tearing. If this curtain was separating the holy of holies, the symbolism indicated that everyone now had access to God's presence (Heb. 6:19; 9:12–13; 10:19–20).

The earth quaked, probably causing rocks to **split**. At the same time, **tombs were also opened** and **saints . . . were raised**. An earthquake is a common biblical symbol for God's activity. A large earthquake would cause the rocks, massive boulders, to split. Many tombs were hewn into the rock, so they also could be opened in earthquake-prone areas.

In this verse, Matthew returned to what happened at the cross. The **centurion**, mentioned here for the first time, and the execution squad **saw the earthquake** as well as the other supernatural events that took place during the crucifixion. They likely associated these events with Jesus's loud cries from the cross. Regardless, they were **terrified** by it all.

Truly emphasized certainty, and Romans would use *Son of God* exclusively as a title for the emperor. Even if these words did not have the full meaning of later Christian confessions, making the same confession as the disciples (Matt. 14:33) and Peter (16:16) was significant to Matthew. He intended his readers (including us) to interpret these words in their highest and truest sense.

Next Week – Strong and Courageous, Joshua 1:1-11, 16:18

