

The Church of the Servant King

Survey of the Bible Series – Matthew

SB_MT27B_The Crucifixion

At the conclusion of our last lesson, we see Jesus being scourged in verse 26. It is possible that this was an attempt by Pilate to punish Jesus so severely that the crowds would be appeased and accept scourging as a sufficient punishment. Regardless, scourging was a life-threatening punishment.¹

The Soldiers Treatment of Jesus (27:27-31)

Jesus was brought into the Praetorium sometimes called the judgment hall. While the term was generally used to refer to the headquarters of a Roman leader such as the tent of the commander in a Roman camp, in Jerusalem it referred to the palace which was built by Herod the Great and which the Roman procurators occupied whenever they came from Caesarea to Jerusalem on public business.² Sometimes the word is translated “judgment hall” as in the King James Version. The Praetorium must have been a large area since it housed a garrison or cohort which was one-tenth of a legion or 600 men.³ Only the most spiritual man with a personal sense of destiny could have faced 600 hardened Roman soldiers with the poise that Jesus demonstrated. This fact was a fulfillment of such prophecies as Psalm 38:13-14; Isaiah 42:2 and 53:7 and His poise in the face of such extreme adversity is documented by Peter in 1 Peter 2:23.

The Roman soldiers basically tortured Jesus for their own amusement. They removed His clothing, put a scarlet robe on him, placed a crown of thorns on his head, gave him a staff for a scepter, and knelt before Him in mockery. All the while, they spit upon him and repeatedly struck Him in the head with the staff. All of this was in fulfillment of such prophecies and descriptions of the sufferings of Israel’s Messiah as Psalm 22:6-8, 12-13; 31:11-12; 35:15-16; 38:18-19; 69:19-20; Isaiah 50:6; 52:14; and 53:3. Jesus was unrecognizable by those who had known Him at this point after all of the beating.

The King Placed on a Cross (27:32-44)

Crucifixion was considered by the Romans to be the cruelest form of execution since it took some time for the person crucified to die. Sometimes the victim died after two or even three days of agonizing pain and suffering that included thirst and asphyxiation. Many times, the death was as much the result of attack by animals since the person being crucified hung much closer to the ground than is sometimes depicted by artists.

Obviously, Jesus was unable to carry His own cross beam after what He had already endured. Therefore, the Romans required a Simon of Cyrene (located in North Africa and the

¹ See quotation of James M. Stalker, *The Trial and Death of Jesus Christ* (1894; Reprint ed., Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1961), 59 in J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ, A Study of the Life of Christ* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 474. See also selected excerpts from William D. Edwards, Wesley J. Gabel and Floyd E. Hosmer, “On the Physical Death of Christ,” *Journal of the American Medical Association* 25:11 (March 21, 1986), 1455-1463. Both of these sources, as well as numerous others, document the horrible wounds inflicted upon the person scourged when the instrument used contained leather strips with bits of bone, iron or other sharp objects attached.

² Merrill F. Unger, *The New Unger’s Bible Dictionary* (Chicago, Illinois: Moody Press, 1988), 1024.

³ Louis A. Barbieri, Jr., “Matthew,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, gen. ed. (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1983), 88.

home of many Jews)⁴ to bear the burden. All three of the synoptic Gospels identify Jesus' cross bearer as Simon of Cyrene, but only Mark adds that he was the father of Alexander and Rufus. Paul greets a Rufus in Romans 16:13. It is possible that Simon became a believer as a result of this experience; however, there is no Scriptural evidence of it.

The soldiers offered Jesus sour wine (vinegar) and myrrh to numb the pain, but Jesus refused. The offer of vinegar was in fulfillment of Psalm 69:21. Today, we take the making of wine in abundance for granted; however, it has not always been the case. In addition, storage mechanisms for wine were not as plentiful as today. Wine turns to a form of vinegar as it goes bad. No doubt, Jesus wanted to be in complete control of His senses as He fulfilled prophecy and uttered His final and very important words on the Cross. The soldiers also cast lots for His garments in fulfillment of Psalm 22:18. He was crucified with two robbers in fulfillment of Isaiah 53:12.

The Romans, at the direction of Pilate, placed a sign over Jesus' head on which was written "Jesus, the King of the Jews." John noted that Pilate had the sign written in Aramaic, Latin, and Greek (Jn 19:20). Even while on the Cross, Jesus was an object of their viewing pleasure and subjected to verbal torment from by-passers. This was in fulfillment of Psalm 22:6-8; 35:21; and Zechariah 12:10. Even the robbers who were being crucified joined in the verbal abuse. However, Luke records that one of the robbers believed in Him (Luke 23:39-43).

Jesus Dies on the Cross (27:45-56)

Mark indicates that the crucifixion began at the "third hour" (Mark 15:25) or at 9:00 am. Matthew indicates that from the sixth hour (noon) until the ninth hour (3:00 pm), there was darkness over all the land. During this three hour period, Jesus suffered spiritual death and became the sin offering for the world (John 1:29; Ro 5:8; 2 Cor 5:21; 1 Pe 2:24; 3:18). So, Jesus really died twice on the Cross – once spiritually to pay for sin and once physically for himself. Jesus made the connection between His physical and spiritual suffering on the Cross and the prophetic message in Psalm 22 when He cried out "My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?" (Matt 27:46 cf. Psa 22:1). The Father had to make a judicial decision regarding His Son and turn from Him (Ro 3:25-26).

When the Bible refers to the blood of Christ as the means for such provisions connected with salvation as redemption (Eph 1:7; Col 1:14; 1 Pe 1:18-19), justification (Ro 5:9), sanctification (1 Co 1:30) and propitiation (Heb 13:12), it is referring to His spiritual death and not His physical blood or His physical death. When His spiritual death was completed and before He died physically, He cried out "It is finished" (John 19:30). Jesus was referring to the fact that His work of paying for the sins of mankind was finished. At the moment He spoke these words He was still alive.

Matthew records several phenomena that occurred simultaneously with Jesus' death. The curtain that separated the holy place and the holy of holies in the temple was torn in two. This curtain was as thick as a man's hand is wide and its dimensions were about 60 feet long and 30 feet wide.⁵ Next, Matthew records that there was an earthquake and many graves were opened in connection with the earthquake so that some of dead who had been believers were resuscitated (like Lazarus), came out of their graves after Jesus' resurrection and appeared to many. They could not have received a resurrection body prior to Jesus since He is the firstborn

⁴ J. W. Shepard, *The Christ of the Gospels* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1946), 594 in J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ, A Study of the Life of Christ* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 478.

⁵ Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, Volume 2* (New York: Longmans, Green, 1912), 589 in J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ, A Study of the Life of Christ* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 488.

from the dead (Col 1:18; Re 1:5) and the first-fruits of those who are asleep (1 Co 15:20, 23). Most likely, these people so raised had been contemporaries of those still alive at the time of Jesus' death. All of these things greatly impressed the Roman soldiers to the point of exclaiming that Jesus must have been a deity. However, their statement doesn't necessarily indicate a saving faith.