



Truly This Is the Son of God

Series: Matthew: The King and His Kingdom

Matthew 27:27-54

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We come today to the focal point toward which the entirety of Christ's life, as recorded for us by Matthew, has been pointing. The crucifixion of Jesus Christ is the climax of redemptive history, the focal point of God's eternal plan of redemption, His plan to save sinners and yet uphold the fullness of His holiness and glory. This death of Christ on our behalf is the supreme revelation of God's gracious, saving, love and of the depravity and wickedness of man. We stand upon holy ground this morning as we look first at the

The Mocking of the Cross (v. 27-44) Read with me, starting in verse 27: "Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor's headquarters, and they gathered the whole battalion before him. And they stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, and 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!" And they spit on him and took the reed and struck him on the head. And 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." (Matthew 27:27-31, ESV) At the close of the text that we looked at last week, we saw that Pilate, the trial finished and his sentence pronounced, turned Christ over to the soldiers under his command to be scourged. "Then he released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, delivered him to be crucified." (Matthew 27:26, ESV)

Scourging was a horrific and brutal act and oftentimes proved fatal. Chained to a wooden post, his clothes stripped from his body, Christ was whipped relentlessly with a "cat o' nine tails," a short wooden handle with numerous long lashes of leather each with a sharp piece of glass, metal, bone, or other hard object attached to the end of it. One or two scourge-bearers, called lictors, would then deliver blows, skillfully laying the lashes diagonally across the back and the legs with murderous force. The only stipulation governing scourging was that a man should be flogged until the flesh hung from his back. The blows would rain down until the skin split open

and the muscles were cut and torn, till ligaments were severed and bone chipped. This is what Christ endured at the hands of these Roman soldiers, beaten and whipped, the wholly innocent one, treated as if He were guilty, punished as if He were a vile offender.

But scourging Jesus wasn't enough for the Romans. Jesus was a comic figure to them, someone to be mocked and made sport of. They gathered the whole Roman battalion, some 600 men, to witness the shameless exhibition that followed. Once again stripped before the garrison, the Roman soldiers draped a faded, coarse military cloak over Jesus, not the rich robe of a ruler. On the torn flesh of His back, it must have caused horrific pain. They fashioned a crown of thorns and forced it upon His sacred head, the thorns penetrating deeply into His skin. They gave Him a reed for a scepter, a frail imitation of the scepter Caesar carried on festive state occasions.

Then they showed their utter contempt for Him by feigning the sort of veneration one would show to royalty, bowing at His feet, saying "Hail, King of the Jews!" in jeering, mocking tones. The humiliation complete, they spat on Him, taking the reed from his hand and using it to strike Him repeatedly on His head. Their aim was clearly to make a complete mockery of His claim that He was a king.

But the soldiers were utterly ignorant about who He really was -- the King of kings who quite literally rules the world and every person in it. His rightful crown, a crown of glory, His rightful scepter a rod of iron, His rightful robe a robe of splendor and righteousness, dipped in blood and on it a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords." (Revelation 19:16, ESV) They could not see it but He is the King of all Kings and they were mocking a glory they knew not of. The sport ended, they led Jesus out to be crucified. Matthew tells us

"As they went out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name. They compelled this man to carry his cross." (Matthew 27:32, ESV) Victims of crucifixion were usually made to wear a placard around the neck on which was written the crime for which they were condemned. It was part of the shame that was deliberately inflicted on victims of crucifixion. They were led through the streets and made to walk in a public procession in order to maximize the humiliation of the spectacle. They were also forced to carry their own cross to the place of execution. It was the way that the Romans would break the will of the one who was being crucified.

Step by excruciating step, Jesus stumbled to Golgotha. We do not know how far He carried the cross, but His body broken and blood loss immense, He cannot carry it for long. That's where Simon comes in. As Jesus was leaving the city, Simon was apparently entering. Conscripted by the Romans, and by divine appointment, he was forced to carry Christ's cross the rest of the way to Golgotha. You would think that Simon would have resented this and would have carried the cross to Golgotha, flung it down and gotten away as soon as possible. But I don't believe that it turned out that way. I believe that Simon watched the entire proceeding from this point on and was saved as a result of what he saw in Christ. Let me tell you why. Mark, in his gospel written from Rome and initially for a Roman audience, describes Simon as the father of Alexander and Rufus. That's important. Gospel writers don't do that for no reason. He does it because he expects his readers in Rome to recognize the names of these two Christian men. If you look at Paul letter to the Romans, in chapter 16 and verse 13 we read, "Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord; also his mother, who has been a mother to me as well." (Romans 16:13, ESV) Rufus would have been widely known as a believer in Christ. His mother was so dear to Paul and had no doubt ministered to him, that he could call her his own mother. Things must have happened to Simon on the way to Golgotha. So much that it affected his entire family. There is no way to know with certainty, but it seems to be the case. Matthew continues

"And when they came to a place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull), they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall, but when he tasted it, he would not drink it." (Matthew 27:33–34, ESV) The noble women in Jerusalem would prepare this drink, a sort of narcotic, to be given to those who were being crucified as a mission of mercy, but Jesus refused it, determined to endure the cross in all of its horror and pain, fully aware of what he was doing, nothing numbing His senses as He tasted death for us. Matthew continues:

"And 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, which read, "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews."" (Matthew 27:35–37, ESV) In an echo of Psalm 18:22, the Romans played games at the foot of the cross as Jesus hung there in torture and in pain, casting lots for His clothing. But not before they hung the charge for which He was being crucified over His head for all to see. "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews." Just consider the scene for a moment and it is then that the truth hits you; the irony of it all hits you right between the eyes. He is paying the penalty on the cross for the "crime" of being who He is. His only crime is actually being who He claimed to be – the King of the Jews, the Son of God. There He hung, naked, shamed, covered with the spittle from the mouths of foul men and His own holy blood. His head, his back, His legs, His hands His feet, dripping with blood, throbbing in

excruciating pain, the Lord of Glory hung suspended between heaven and earth, enduring the wrath reserved for you and me.

“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 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.”” (Matthew 27:38–40, ESV) The mockery of Jesus begins again in earnest. First, He is crucified between two thieves, so that Christ occupies the central focus of derision – he center cross the place of supreme dishonor. Passersby, shaking their heads, take up the slanderous and deliberately misinterpreted accusation made before the Sanhedrin: “You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself! – only they add to it -- If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross. Scornfully, sneeringly they exclaim that the one way that Jesus can prove Himself to be the Son of God is to come down from the cross. They insinuate that it is only His own weakness that keeps Him on the cross. They are blind fools! It is His strength – the strength of His love, His love for sinners, His love for His Father that keeps Him on the tree of death. Having rejected all the testimonies to Him as the Son of God, they prefer instead to mock, to jeer, to blaspheme the One who had worked wonders among them and was now choosing to be crucified for them.

“So also the chief priests, with the scribes and elders, mocked him, saying, “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. He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him. For he said, ‘I am the Son of God.’ ”” (Matthew 27:41–43, ESV) So delighted are the Sanhedrin that their archenemy is now hanging on the cross, they forget any pretext of dignity and join in the mocking of the crowds, only rather than speaking to Christ, so much do they hate Him and hold Him in contempt, that they do not talk to Him but instead talk about Him. Notice how their own words condemn them -- He saved others; he cannot save himself. They do not deny His miraculous works of mercy, not at all. They admitted His miraculous power before but claimed that it came from the devil. Beelzebub must be have abandoned Him they think. Their thoughts are blasphemous. And yet, though they do not mean to, they speak the truth. Jesus cannot save Himself. He cannot save Himself and save us too.

Then, similar to the worn out lines of the crowd, the chief priest, scribes and elders say: He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. Of course that is a lie. There was nothing that Jesus could do to satisfy their unbelief.

But they save their greatest insult for last. He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him. For he said, 'I am the Son of God.' What reprehensible me they are. They say in essence: "He's a God follower, relies on God, trusts in God. Well, if God wants Him, if He delights in Him, let God save Him if He loves Him so much. He's God's Son, isn't he?" What they do not understand is that these last words are not just insults directed at the Son but at the Father as well. Hanging on the cross is one who delighted to do the will of the Father; suffering for sinners in their place was the beloved Son in whom God is well pleased. They are mocking the very foundation of the relationship between the Father and the Son. But there is even more.

"And the robbers who were crucified with him also reviled him in the same way." (Matthew 27:44, ESV) Saying the same words, the men who were being crucified with Him, men of ill repute are mocking the sinless, perfect Son, questioning the Father's love and Christ's Sonship. We know from Luke's account that by the end of the Christ's sufferings on the cross that one of the thieves was saved and would actually defend Christ's honor. He would receive the grace of God and His heart would be moved to faith, drawn to Christ by the hand of the Father, but that was later... not now.

The restraint of Jesus in all of this is almost incomprehensible. How did He do it? I can only imagine that His restraint was borne out of the eternal truth that He alone knew. As God's Son, He possessed a hidden and an untouchable dignity that these who mocked Him could never touch. He knew that His was the eternal and unmitigated glory that the Father had reserved for Him at His right hand. And as the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world, intent on bringing redemption to the world, He knew that the mocking and scornful contempt that He endured was for this purpose – so that He would bring salvation to His people, to His church, to sinners in desperate need of His saving grace.

Ironically, despite their unbelief, the titles of Jesus are confessed by the very men who are mocking Him – King of the Jews, temple-builder, Son of God, King of Israel – meant to mock Him they instead point to His glory in the midst of the degrading humiliation and suffering of the cross by which His Lordship is forever magnified. This is the mocking Christ endured but look with me now at the miracles of the cross.

The Miracles of the Cross (v. 45-56) Matthew tells us: "Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour." (Matthew 27:45, ESV) It is the middle of the day, at noon, when the sun would have been at its zenith, that the whole land was draped in thick, deep, intense darkness for three hours. God covers the land with a darkness that can be felt. When Christ was born, the night sky was ablaze with the glory of God and now as He dies on the cross, the brightness of the noon sun is obscured with darkness. The narrative ceases, the words of Matthew say nothing of what is taking place under the veil of darkness, but we know. During those hours of darkness, the Son of God took the burden of our sin upon Himself – "He became sin for us" – and He was punished for our sin in our place. He was made a curse for us, being wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities, His Father laying on Him the iniquity of us all. The darkness meant judgment – judgment on Christ for our sins, as the wrath of God against His people was burned out in the very heart of Jesus, so that He, our substitute suffered the most intense agony, Indescribable woe, and the terrible isolation of forsakenness. It is no exaggeration, no preacherly turn of a phrase to say that Hell came to Golgotha that day and the Savior descended into it and bore its horrors in our place while darkness veiled it all.

"And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46, ESV) Of all the agony of that tortuous day, the lacerations of the scourging, the chafing of the thorns around his head, the convulsions of his tormented, dehydrated body, as it hung in the heat, nothing reaches the depth of this anguished cry of desolation, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" How can we understand this cry? Surely it cannot mean that the Father ceased loving the Son -- His love is from everlasting to everlasting, nor that the Son ceased trusting the Father – He is calling Him "My God, My God..." It is a deep mystery. JC Ryle said of these words: There is a deep mystery in these words, which no mortal man can fathom. No doubt they were not wrung from our Lord by mere bodily pain. Such an explanation His utterly unsatisfactory, and dishonorable to our blessed Savior. They were meant to express the real pressure on His soul of the enormous burden of a world's sins. They were meant to show how truly and literally He was our substitute, was made sin, and a curse for us, and endured God's righteous anger against a world's sin in His own person. At that dreadful moment, the iniquity of us all was laid upon Him to the uttermost. It pleased the Lord to bruise Him, and put Him to grief. (Isaiah 53:10.) He bore our sins. He carried our transgressions. Heavy must have been that burden, real and literal must have been our Lord's substitution for us, when He, the eternal Son of God, could speak of Himself as for a time "forsaken."

Jesus, who from eternity has been fully pleasing to God, who while on the earth was sustained by the immediacy of his relationship with God, who enjoyed from all eternity the fullness of intimacy and fellowship with the Father, and who lived by the power of the Holy Spirit, found Himself totally alone, utterly forsaken, on the cross. Like a divine sponge, Jesus took all the sins of the elect of mankind...past present and future...and absorbed them all. At one awful moment, Jesus bore our sins. Condemned by man and forsaken by God, Jesus Christ went through the hell of the cross that we might be saved from the Hell that we all deserve. Darkness fell, His Father's face was turned away. He was separated from the Father. In agony and anguish. He was literally under the curse of Hell for every one of us. What astounding love. What a miracle of grace. What a necessary miracle of grace.

Beloved, we could never know salvation from the penalty of sin, release from the power of sin, or freedom from the presence of sin apart from this death of Christ for us. All of the confession, repentance, faith, tears, and remorse that you could humanly muster, would be absolutely useless power of the blood of Jesus given for you. There is no way out of hell, and no way into heaven, except through His cross and through his broken body and shed blood.

The people around the cross had no idea of the importance of what was taking place. They were unsure of how to respond. Matthew says: "And some of the bystanders, hearing it, said, "This man is calling Elijah." And one of them at once ran and took a sponge, filled it with sour wine, and put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink. But the others said, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him."" (Matthew 27:47-49, ESV) But the wait for something else to happen ended abruptly.

"And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit." (Matthew 27:50, ESV) His strength was not abated. This was no quiet resignation to death. His last word was not the gasping breath of a vanquished man, but the triumphant shout of a conquering King. And what was it that He said? John tells us: IT IS FINISHED! The saving work the Father had given Him to do was finished. As He hung there, like a victim, He nonetheless celebrated the greatest triumph in the history of the universe. Christ's atoning work was finished; redemption for sinners was finished; and He was triumphant. God's justice was satisfied. The curse of the law was finished. The ransom for sin was paid in full. The wages of sin were settled forever. Death, and hell and the grave were vanquished. IT IS FINISHED.

His work complete, He yielded up His Spirit, His life, He laid it down. It was not taken from Him. He laid it down as our voluntary Substitute, our Surety, our vicarious Savior and Victorious Lord! And God the Father put the exclamation point on what the Son had accomplished.

“And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split.” (Matthew 27:51, ESV) From top to bottom, the curtain in the temple, the curtain that once divided sinful man from holy God, the curtain that symbolized the separation of sinful man from God, was torn from top to bottom as by the hand of God. The way into God’s presence has now been opened through the tearing of the Son’s flesh, the sacrifice of the Son. Christ’s death tore open the curtain of life with God to every believer, opening a fountain of forgiveness for all sin. The death of the Son had solved the great problem – how God could be perfectly holy and yet perfectly merciful, perfectly holy and receive sinful men to Himself – through Christ alone.

There was no more need of an earthly high priest, and a mercy seat, and a sprinkling of blood, and an offering up of incense, and a day of atonement. The true High Priest had finally appeared. The true Lamb of God had been slain. The true mercy seat was finally revealed. The true Day of Atonement had come. That rending of the veil proclaimed the opening of the way of salvation to all mankind. All may now draw near to God with boldness, and approach Him with confidence, by faith in Jesus. It is earth-shaking truth, which God announced by shaking the earth. And Matthew tells us:

“The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many.” (Matthew 27:52–53, ESV) When Christ died, the earth quaked and tombs were split open and as the testimony to the life-giving power of the cross and the resurrection, the salvation that came by the death of Christ, after His resurrection, the bodies of many saints who had trusted in the coming Son, were raised from the dead and appeared to many. They were visible demonstrations of Christ’s life-giving power by which He will raise our bodies of flesh and make them like His own – glorified, immortal, sinless and glorious.

Through all of this, God testified to His delight in His Son. God the Father mocked the mockers. And Matthew tells us, “When the centurion and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place (everything that surrounded Christ’s crucifixion, the perfection of His person in the face of mocking, the miracles wrought by God), they were filled with awe and said, “Truly this was the Son of God!”” (Matthew 27:54, ESV) If they were honest, if they beheld all that was taking place before their eyes without bias; they could come to no other conclusion. This is the Son of God and His death on the cross has a significance and a meaning that no other death on any cross has ever had. Think with me, in closing, about the meaning of the cross.

The Meaning of the Cross No one has ever lived, no one has ever suffered and no one has ever died like Jesus Christ. No one. All that the Lord Jesus Christ suffered at the hands of evil men, all that He endured upon the cross as darkness descended upon the earth – all of it He suffered vicariously, as our substitute, because He was made sin for us so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God. Every aspect of Christ’s passion is worthy of reflection.

Was he condemned though innocent? It was for you and me. It was so we might be acquitted, though guilty. Was He scourged? It was for you and me. He was scourged in our place, suffering what we deserve for our sins. And as the blood which would purchase our salvation began to flow, the stripes of our healing were etched into the back of our Savior. With each arc, with each blow, you can almost hear the sins of man laid upon Him -- Idolatry, rebellion, fornication, hatred, abuse, drunkenness, covetousness, pride, gossip, adultery, homosexuality, abortion, wickedness, addiction, sorcery, murder, strife, deceit, backbiting, disobedience. Over and over again. This scourging of Christ was an visible picture of the strokes of divine justice, which he endured in his soul as our when he was stricken, smitten, and afflicted by the sword of divine justice as our Substitute. “Upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.” (Isaiah 53:5, ESV) With every blow, He was purchasing for us the treasures of grace.

Was He stripped of his garments then dressed in a tattered old soldier’s robe? It was so we might clothed with the garments of salvation and covered with the robe of righteousness (cf. Isaiah 61:10) Was He given thorns for a crown? It was so that we might wear the crown of glory. Was He mocked and reviled? It was so we could be honored and blessed by God. Was He killed for being the Son of God? It was so we could be freed from he death we deserve as the sons of Adam and adopted as sons and daughters of God. Was he reckoned a sinner and

numbered among transgressors? It was so we could be reckoned righteous and numbered among the holy. Did He bear the curse of sin? It was only so that He might redeem us from the curse of the Law we have broken. Was He unjustly condemned to die? It was only that He might die the just for the to bring us to God in perfect reconciliation and perfect righteousness. Was He made sin for us? It was only so that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. Was He unable to save Himself? It was only so through His willing death that He could save sinners to the uttermost. Did He die the painful, shameful, humiliating death of the cross? It was only that by His strength and triumphant power we could receive eternal life and be exalted to heaven. Was He forsaken By the Father? Only so that our sins might be fully paid for, put away forever by the sacrifice of Himself. Did He yield up His spirit? Only so that we could receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, "You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body." (1 Corinthians 6:20, ESV)

Now listen, none of what Christ endured was too much, to extreme, over the top. It was not too much -- it was exactly enough, exactly appropriate. This is what it takes to make sinners into saints. You and I needed Him to endure this on our behalf. We deserved what he endured and until you believe that, you will remain a stranger to grace.

What do we say to this? "Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!" (2 Corinthians 9:15, ESV) Let this picture of Christ crucified, as it is set before us by God the Holy Spirit upon the pages of Scripture, be engraved upon our hearts by that same Spirit's grace, compelling us to trust and believe and love the only great Savior!

Here is what I know. Here is what visiting the cross again has stamped indelibly upon my soul. This can't just be a religion, not just something that I do, not just a job -- this Jesus -- not just an addition to my already cluttered life, not just a tradition. Jesus must be my whole life. He demands my all, just as He gave His all for me. There is no way for me to be half-crucified with Christ so I need to stop trying, to take up half a cross, to be half-consecrated to Christ. By God's grace I never want to give Christ the superficial and frivolous. I never want to hold back from Him the best and the dearest things. I never want to lose a single moment by playing at worship ever again. He is worth so much more. I want Him to have the very best of my devotion, the very deepest of my sacrifice, the fullness of my obedience, the whole of my heart. How about you?

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