

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

JAN 2ND-3RD, 2021 // BOOK OF MATTHEW

CRUCIFIXION (MATTHEW 27:32-44)

When someone was crucified, the vertical pole was usually already at the site of the crucifixion and the victim would've been forced to carry their own cross beam, which would've weighed between 70-90 lbs. Jesus had been awake all night, beaten, scourged and abused by soldiers- He must've been physically exhausted. Simon of Cyrene was forced to carry Jesus's cross. Roman soldiers were given authority to impress any person to carry a burden the distance of one mile (Mt. 5:41), so Simon, an African Jew visiting Jerusalem for Passover, was compelled to assist Jesus.

- Here is a picture of discipleship- we're called to take up our cross daily and follow Jesus (Lk. 9:23), and often we don't choose the moment or the method of our serving the Lord.

They arrive at the execution site, Golgotha (the "place of a skull", Latin, calvaria) where the upright stakes are already planted in the ground (vs. 33).

- Scholars believe that the wine mixed with gall might have been a powerful narcotic offered to victims to ease the pain- but Jesus refused the drink and took the full suffering of the cross (vs. 34).

A victim of crucifixion would normally be tied to the cross or nailed through the wrists if a quicker death was desired.

- The cross beam would then be lifted-up and tied to the already affixed pole where a small wooden block was placed halfway up to provide a seat for the body lest the nails tear open the wounds, or the ropes force the arms from their sockets.
- Finally, the feet were tied or nailed to the post.

Death was caused by the loss of blood circulation and coronary failure.

- Especially if the victims were tied, it could take days of hideous pain as the extremities turned slowly gangrenous; so often the soldiers would break the victim's legs with a club, causing massive shock and a quick death (Jn. 19:32-33).

Soldiers sat down to oversee the execution and gambled over Jesus' clothing (Ps. 22:18), as the charge against Him was put over His head (vs. 37).

- On either side of him were two criminals (vs. 38), and those who passed by the cross cruelly mocked and verbally abused Him along with the criminals (vs.39-44).
- Those mocking Him didn't seem to understand that Jesus saves others precisely by not saving Himself.

A SPIRIT YIELDED UP (MATTHEW 27:45-50)

Jesus endured this suffering and abuse for three hours (from 9am to noon), then at noon an even worse torture fell upon Jesus- the Father turned His back on His own son (vs. 45-46).

- The perfect communion of eternity past was broken as Jesus began to bear the hell (separation from God) of punishment for a world of sins as thick darkness covered the earth for those 3 hours (vs. 45).

The 3 hours of darkness seems to be connected to the 3 days of darkness in Egypt before Passover (Ex. 10:21-23) and the darkness the prophet Amos saw (Amos 8:9-11).

- It was as if creation mourned its Creator's spiritual death (separation from the Father) and turned its back on the One the Father now turned away from because sin.
- In agony, Jesus cried out Ps. 22:1 in Aramaic.

Those standing nearby misunderstood Jesus and thought He was calling Elijah, the miracle working prophet, to help Him.

- One of the bystanders felt pity and gave Jesus sour wine to drink on a sponge fixed to a reed (vs. 48), but the others waited to see if Elijah would come to His rescue.
- Then Jesus cried out with a loud voice and "dismissed" His Spirit (John 10:18).

Jesus had said that He'd been given by the Father the authority to lay His life down willingly, without anyone taking it from Him. King Jesus was sovereign even over the timing of His own death. The loud cry was a shout of triumph and completion-"it is finished", tetelestai (Jn. 19:30). The debt owed to His Father for the sins of the world was paid in full.

"TRULY, THIS WAS THE SON OF GOD." (MATTHEW 27:51-54)

As Jesus cries out in a loud voice during His final act on Passover Friday, Matthew records three miraculous signs that occurred simultaneously.

- These are audacious claims! Claiming that these supernatural things literally happened in a document only 15-30 years after the fact is a risky thing- unless they actually did happen.
- These happened to communicate something about the gospel.

1. THE CURTAIN OF THE TEMPLE

In the temple, the Holy of Holies was the innermost sanctuary, the place where the ark of the covenant rested and where the presence of God abided. This place was so sacred that only once a year (the Day of Atonement) only the High Priest was allowed to enter to offer sacrifice to atone for the sins of Israel. The room outside the Holy of Holies was the Holy Place, and between the two

rooms hung a thick curtain. At the moment of Jesus' death, this curtain was torn from top to bottom- showing it was done by God's initiative. Jesus conquered sin- the thing that separated humanity from God's presence.

2. THE EARTHQUAKE

Perhaps the earthquake simply reflected the immensity of the revolution that had just taken place by the splitting of the curtain. Or maybe it was a reference of what happened at Mt. Sinai when God gave the law to Moses (Ex. 19:16). The earthquake signified that the demands of the law had been met and the curse of the law had been done away with.

3. TOMBS WERE OPENED

The earthquake broke open the tombs of many saints, who were "raised" to life (vs. 52). They came out of the tombs, and after Jesus was resurrected, they went into Jerusalem and appeared to many (vs. 53). These resurrections were a sign that Jesus had conquered death- not just His own, but for all the "saints". The spectacular sign of the earthquake caused the pagan Roman soldier who was overseeing the execution to acknowledge Jesus's divinity (vs. 54). One of Matthew's themes is Jesus being recognized as Messiah by Gentiles (2:1-12, 8:5-13, 15:21-39).

JESUS IS BURIED (MATTHEW 27:55-66)

In a culture where women were largely seen and not heard, Matthew gave unusual honor to women.

- Even though most of the apostles had scattered, he mentions the fact that many of Jesus' female followers were there watching from a distance- among whom were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James & Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee (vs. 56).

After Jesus' death on the cross, a rich man named Joseph went to the Roman governor Pilate to request Jesus' body (vs. 57-58).

- Nicodemus, a Pharisee who had visited Jesus at night to ask questions about God's Kingdom (John 3) accompanied Joseph (John 19:39).
- The two men were granted custody of Jesus' body, and they immediately began to prepare the body for burial (vs. 59).

Jesus' body would've been prepared for burial by wrapping it in expensive linen and placing it on a bed of seventy-five lbs. of spices (Jn. 19:39).

- Then it was placed in Joseph's own tomb which was cut out from rock, where a massive circular stone was rolled across the entrance (vs. 60).
- As Jesus is laid to rest, the two Marys watch in sorrow and anguish (vs. 61).

The next day was the Sabbath, which was the one after Preparation Day (day after Passover Friday).

- The disciples seemed to have forgotten Jesus' promise to rise from the dead on the 3rd day, but the chief priests and Pharisees still remembered.
- They seem worried that Jesus' disciples could easily "fake" a resurrection by stealing the body (vs. 64).

Pilate granted their request and gave them a Roman guard of 16 soldiers (vs. 65) who went and sealed the stone of the tomb (vs. 66).

- Sealing the stone was a process of stretching a cord over the 2-ton rock and fastening that cord with a sealing compound
- Over the cord, the seal of the Roman governor would be placed. The penalty for breaking the seal was death.

WHEN ALL APPEARS LOST

Imagine the suffering and hopelessness of those watching Jesus get placed in the tomb. They know what's He's promised, but all of reality is pointing to the fact that He's gone and never coming back.

We also experience feelings of hopelessness, even though God has given us promises too.

- The problem is that sometimes our circumstances seem bigger and more final than the promises of God.
- This is why it's so crucial for us to read and meditate on God's Word everyday and spend time in His presence through prayer.
- We have to get into the habit of preaching Truth to ourselves because we have an enemy that loves to tell us lies.

Even though it looked like Jesus had been stopped and His mission had been thwarted, through His death Jesus had conquered:

- Sin: the thing that separated humanity from God's presence.
- The Curse of the Law: the righteous standard that we could never live up to.
- Death: Jesus paid our wages for sin (Rom. 6:23).

The power of resurrection can't be fully appreciated until we first feel the sting of death. The light can't be seen for what it is until it gets really dark outside.

- Even if it appears that God is absent and not at work in the world around you, Jesus has already completed a work for you by conquering sin, the curse of the law and death.
- Even if it appears in the world around us that God's mission has been stopped and His plan thwarted, God is about to do something even more miraculous than any of us can possibly imagine.