



## Our Savior

JESUS ENDURED THE CROSS SO THAT WE  
MIGHT HAVE ACCESS TO GOD.

### **MATTHEW 27:27-31,45-54**

Biographers will spend hundreds of pages describing the life of their subjects, but generally limit the pages about their death to just a few. For example, the three-volume biography of Winston Churchill, *The Last Lion*, by William Manchester and Paul Reid devotes 2,622 pages to Churchill's life and only three to his death. This is not the case with the Gospel of Matthew's account of Jesus. Jesus's death was central, and Matthew devoted seven chapters out of twenty-eight to chronicle the events surrounding the crucifixion of Jesus.

 **What does the amount of space devoted to Jesus's death tell you about its importance? Why do you think it's important?**

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# UNDERSTAND **THE CONTEXT**

## **MATTHEW 27:1-66**

With the transition between Matthew 26 and 27, the ordeal of Jesus's arrest and trial shifted from Thursday to Friday. During the night, Jesus endured an illegal trial. Jewish law prohibited night-time trials. In addition, most likely the entire Sanhedrin was not present. This, too, made the trial illegal. At daybreak, another hasty trial finalized charges against Jesus. Initially, Jesus was charged with blasphemy. No doubt, discussion was held concerning what charges to present to the Roman procurator that would prompt the death penalty. Once those charges were agreed upon, Jesus was taken to Pilate for the trial intended to end in His death.

In the meantime, Judas was filled with remorse and returned the money. Matthew is the only Gospel to include that Judas committed suicide by hanging himself. Luke mentioned it in the book of Acts (Acts 1:18-19).

The priests who easily violated the law in trying Jesus were sticklers for the law concerning the returned money. Tainted money could not be used for temple purposes. The priests chose to use the money to buy a plot of ground for a pauper's cemetery.

Next came the trial before the Roman procurator, Pilate, who alone could order an execution. Three charges were brought against Jesus: misleading the nation, refusing to pay taxes, and claiming to be a king (Luke 23:2). These political charges could result in the death penalty. After much wrangling with the Sanhedrin, Pilate finally condemned Jesus to death. Jesus was mocked, tortured by the soldiers, and led away to be crucified.

Matthew initially focused on those around the cross. Not until the end of the crucifixion scene does Matthew turn attention to Jesus and His final moments.

Chapter 27 closes with the burial of Jesus in a borrowed tomb. Although the disciples seem to have forgotten Jesus's promise to rise the third day, the religious leaders had not. They set a guard to prevent anyone from stealing the body. The sealing and guarding of the tomb in the end served as proof to Jesus's resurrection.



**Read Matthew 27:27-31,45-54 in your Bible to gain an understanding of all Jesus went through.**

# EXPLORE THE TEXT

## MOCKED (MATT. 27:27-31)

<sup>27</sup> Then the governor's soldiers took Jesus into the governor's residence and gathered the whole company around him. <sup>28</sup> They stripped him and dressed him in a scarlet robe. <sup>29</sup> They twisted together a crown of thorns, put it on his head, and placed a staff in his right hand. And they knelt down before him and mocked him: "Hail, king of the Jews!" <sup>30</sup> Then they spat on him, took the staff, and kept hitting him on the head. <sup>31</sup> After they had mocked him, they stripped him of the robe, put his own clothes on him, and led him away to crucify him.

### VERSE 27

The crucifixion event began with the wickedness of the Jewish leaders in arresting and creating trumped-up charges against Jesus. It continued with Pilate's decision to hand Jesus over for crucifixion. The wickedness continued as Jesus was handed over to the **governor's soldiers**. No doubt this **whole company** of soldiers, six hundred strong, accompanied Pilate from his residence in Caesarea on the Mediterranean Sea. These soldiers were not the famous Roman legionnaires. According to historians, there were no legionnaires assigned to Judea at this time. These were conscripted soldiers from the various nations conquered by Rome. The **governor's residence** most likely was the Antonia fortress adjacent to the temple precinct. The soldiers were probably housed in that fortress as well.

### VERSES 28-30

The soldiers mocked Jesus. They picked up on the charge against Him that He claimed to be the King of the Jews. Using that, they mocked Jesus as a king by stripping Him of His clothing and putting **a scarlet robe** on Him. This **robe** was an outer garment a soldier used to keep warm as he stood guard.

Adding to the mockery of the robe, the soldiers fashioned a crown out of a thorn bush. The design was a copy of the wreath worn by the Caesar on special occasions. Pictures of this wreath are engraved on Roman coins. This fake crown was then pressed into Jesus's head.

A further symbol of mockery was a **staff** or flimsy reed they placed in His hand as a makeshift scepter. With this they began

verbally abusing Him and crying out **Hail, king of the Jews!** No doubt these words were accompanied by laughter and derision. The whole scene was designed to humiliate.

More atrocities followed as the soldiers **spat on** Jesus and continued **hitting him on the head** with the staff. Jesus had predicted these things would happen, “They will hand him over to the Gentiles to be mocked, flogged, and crucified, and on the third day he will be raised” (Matt. 20:19). All of this happened in addition to the severe flogging (27:26). Punishment by flogging was brutal in and of itself.

### VERSE 31

Finally, the mockery and beating ended. The soldiers removed the cloak and put Jesus’s own clothes back on Him. This is an interesting fact because historians indicate that the normal procedure was to march a prisoner naked to the site of execution and then to crucify them naked. This action of putting clothing on Jesus may have been a move by the Romans to placate the Jews who had great aversion to public nudity.



**What emotions does this passage evoke in you?**

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### FORSAKEN (MATT. 27:45-49)

<sup>45</sup> **From noon until three in the afternoon, darkness came over the whole land.** <sup>46</sup> **About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out with a loud voice, “*Elí, Elí, lemá sabachtháni?*” that is, “My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?”** <sup>47</sup> **When some of those standing there heard this, they said, “He’s calling for Elijah.”** <sup>48</sup> **Immediately one of them ran and got a sponge, filled it with sour wine, put it on a stick, and offered him a drink.**

<sup>49</sup> **But the rest said, “Let’s see if Elijah comes to save him.”**

### VERSES 45-46

The wickedness surrounding the crucifixion continued with the horror of the physical suffering of the cross. The soldiers greedily gambled for His clothing. The religious leaders taunted Him, and two insurrectionists executed with Him also called out insults and taunts against Him. Finally, in verse 45, Matthew’s focus turned to Jesus Himself and the last three hours of His life.

Around **noon** the sky became unnaturally dark. This was the first of four supernatural events surrounding Jesus's death. The other three are the temple curtain being torn, the earthquake, and the dead raised (vv. 51-52). Matthew's inference is that the **darkness** was a sign of God's displeasure. It was reminiscent of the darkness in Egypt during the first deliverance of God's people (Ex. 10:22-23). This darkness covered **the whole land**. Whether this referred to the local region or a worldwide darkness cannot be determined.

Matthew makes no mention of when the crucifixion began. Based on information from Mark 15:25, it was probably at the third hour of the day, or nine in the morning. Verse 46 narrates the final hour or so of Jesus's life. While the other Gospels record more final words of Jesus, Matthew records only one. In a loud voice, He cried out in Aramaic these words taken from Psalm 22:1: **Elí, Elí, lemá sabachtháni**. This was a cry of despair that God had forsaken Him. Translated, this cry meant **my God, my God, why have you abandoned me?** This cry is at the same time a poignant plea and a strange declaration.

How could it be that God abandoned Jesus? God is holy and cannot look on sin. He turned away from Jesus bearing the sin of all the world and of all time on the cross. This is a deep look at the extreme seriousness of sin and its ultimate results. Not only does sin separate us from God (Isa. 59:2), but sin also separated God the Father from God the Son.

#### VERSES 47-49

Jesus's words were misunderstood by some surrounding the cross. When He called out *Eli*, He was speaking of God. But some at the cross thought He was calling out for **Elijah** the prophet. Based on the prophecy in Malachi 4:5 that Elijah would return before the day of the Lord, some thought Jesus was calling for Elijah to rescue Him.

In response, someone again offered Him vinegar or cheap wine that served to quench thirst and lessen the pain. Jesus had refused the drink earlier (v. 34). The sour wine offered at the beginning of the crucifixion was mixed with some type of narcotic to ease the pain of the cross. Matthew called this additive "gall" or "bile." Mark called it "myrrh," while Luke and John speak only of "sour wine." Whether this was the same wine offered in verse 48 is not known. Soldiers often had a supply of sour wine for their own re-hydration. This may be what was offered to Jesus. This entire incident echoes the words of messianic Psalm 69:21: "Instead, they gave me gall for my food, and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink."



How does Jesus's cry on the cross point to the greatness of our sin?

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## ***Jesus did not die with a whimper.***

### **SON OF GOD (MATT. 27:50-54)**

<sup>50</sup> But Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and gave up his spirit. <sup>51</sup> Suddenly, the curtain of the sanctuary was torn in two from top to bottom, the earth quaked, and the rocks were split. <sup>52</sup> The tombs were also opened and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised. <sup>53</sup> And they came out of the tombs after his resurrection, entered the holy city, and appeared to many. <sup>54</sup> When the centurion and those with him, who were keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and the things that had happened, they were terrified and said, “Truly this man was the Son of God!”

### **VERSES 50-51**

Once again, Jesus cried out with a ***loud voice*** (also in v. 46). Jesus did not die with a whimper. Most who were crucified would grow weaker with their voices barely audible, but Jesus ***cried out*** loudly. He was not defeated but in full control of His senses. His task was complete. John's Gospel indicates what Jesus cried out: “It is finished” (John 19:30).

With that cry, Jesus ***gave up his spirit***. This statement parallels Jesus's words from Luke 23:46: “Father, into your hands I entrust my spirit.” (See Ps. 31:5.) When the spiritual battle was complete—the sins of the world were atoned for—Jesus voluntarily gave up His spirit to His Father. “No one takes it from me, but I lay it down on my own” (John 10:18).

The word ***suddenly*** in verse 51 translates a phrase meaning “and behold, look.” The second phenomenal act of God while Jesus was on the cross was the tearing of ***the curtain of the sanctuary***. This occurred during Passover when the temple was filled with many thousands of worshipers. Dating back to the construction of the tabernacle during the exodus from Egypt, this curtain separated

the holy place from the holy of holies and was a symbol of separation (Ex. 26:31-33). The curtain in Herod's temple was reportedly almost twenty-one inches thick. For such a curtain to be split from **top to bottom** could only be an act of God. Symbolically, the barrier between Holy God and unholy humanity was removed by the death of Jesus. The way was now open for all to approach God (Heb. 4:16).

Coinciding with the curtain being torn in two was a violent earthquake. This earthquake evidently was the force behind another supernatural occurrence at the time of Jesus's death, the opening of the graves of a select group of people.

### ***The barrier between Holy God and unholy humanity was removed by the death of Jesus.***

#### **VERSES 52-53**

Matthew alone recorded this supernatural event. Interpreters are divided on exactly what occurred. Obviously, the earthquake **opened** the **tombs** of a select group of God's people who had died. The issue concerns the timing of when these people came forth from their tombs. Paul spoke of Jesus being the firstfruits of all who have died (1 Cor. 15:20). For these **saints** to come from their graves and appear to people *before* Jesus's resurrection would contradict Paul's statement. These verses indicate that while the tombs were opened during the earthquake, these saints did not come from their tombs until **after** Jesus's **resurrection**. They then **appeared** in Jerusalem. While Matthew doesn't tell us what happened to these people, we can only speculate that eventually they were taken to heaven.

Perhaps a larger question about this event is the question, why? What was significant about a select few being raised because of the death of Jesus? Again, we can only surmise. Sin ultimately is the thing that brought death into the world. The power of sin and death were broken through the crucifixion of Jesus. Had God not limited such resurrections, might all those enchained by death have risen as well? That is a testimony to the power of the cross and the resurrection!



#### **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.)

## VERSE 54

Matthew focused next on several witnesses around the cross, specifically a Roman **centurion and those with him**. A centurion was a commander of one hundred soldiers. He, and others with him, were **keeping watch** over the entire proceedings. They were eyewitnesses to the **things that had happened**. This would have included the darkness, the manner of Jesus's death, and the earthquake. It is possible that word about the torn temple curtain had already begun to spread throughout Jerusalem. All these events pointed to the truth that Jesus was **the Son of God**.

 **What evidence from the day's events might be used to help others recognize that Jesus was the Son of God?**

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 **BIBLE SKILL:** *Examine an Old Testament passage to better understand a New Testament truth.*

Of Jesus's seven cries from the cross, the only one Matthew recorded was Jesus's quote from Psalm 22:1. Psalm 22 is a messianic psalm that predicted much of what Jesus suffered on the cross. Read and reflect on Psalm 22. Why are these messianic prophecies so important today? Use what you learned from Psalm 22 as a cross reference for deeper study into Matthew 27:33-50; Mark 15:22-37; Luke 23:33-48; and John 19:17-37.

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# APPLY THE TEXT

- + Jesus's willingness to endure the shame and humiliation of crucifixion leads us to humble surrender and praise.
- + We can be confident in knowing that Jesus's death was part of God's redemptive plan.
- + The crucifixion of Jesus calls for the response of faith.



**As a group, make a list of things people do to try to get into heaven. Why is each one a dead end? How do the events that occurred as Jesus was on the cross validate that all the work required for salvation has already been accomplished?**



**What can you personally take away from the account of Jesus's death on the cross? How should that impact your life every day? Are there truths that you discovered that you should share with someone else?**

**Memorize Matthew 27:50-51.**

*Prayer Needs*