

“Crucified!”
Matthew 27:27-54
March 21, 2021

Scripture reading: [Mt 27:32-54]

Last week as we observed Jesus on trial before Pilate and the cruel mockery of Jesus by the Romans soldiers after they scourged Him, we concluded that ***in the cross we see the best of God’s love and the worst of man’s sin***. The worst of man’s sin is not hard to see in the horrific treatment that Jesus receives. But the love of God could not be immediately seen in the events surrounding Jesus’ crucifixion. God’s love would only become comprehensible through God’s own interpretation of what was happening through those events.

Today we are going to see that ***God’s love comes to us on the wings of providence***. By providence, I’m referring to *God’s unseen hand working behind the scenes in surprising ways to bring His love and goodness to bear on undeserving sinners*.

There is an element of surprise in Mt 27. God is working in surprising ways that are veiled to the eye-witness spectators at the cross. Except for Jesus, everyone is oblivious to what’s really happening through the events that they participate in. The Religious leaders, Pilate and the Roman soldiers, even the disciples—none of them suspect that this is the greatest hour and the most significant event in the history of mankind and even eternity. Certainly no one expected that the greatest triumph would come through death or that God’s glory would be displayed on a Roman cross or that eternal bliss would come through blood or that divine acceptance would be offered through His own forsakeness.

Yet as Matthew writes this account of the crucifixion, he we begin to see God’s hand at work behind the scenes. We begin to see how His love comes to us on the wings of providence.

Every detail of the crucifixion of Jesus was turned in the hand of God to bring His redeeming love to bear on undeserving sinners. This is how great

our God is! He was working even through the conspiring of those who hated Christ to accomplish His eternal plan to save those who trust in Jesus.

My outline is simply meant to walk us systematically through this passage so as not to miss the significance of familiar details surrounding the crucifixion.

1. **Through the cross we see the raw humanity of Jesus** (Mt 27:32).

[vs 32] We must never think that because Jesus was the Son of God, He was in any way shielded from the full intensity of physical suffering. The significance of vs. 32 is that it demonstrates the impact that the scourging and the beating by the Roman soldiers had on Jesus. By the time they reached the city gate, Jesus was no longer physically able to carry the cross beam of His cross. As a carpenter, Jesus would have certainly been able under normal circumstances to carry the beam, yet loss of blood along with physical exhaustion and trauma to His body took its toll. While it’s important to emphasize that the most intense suffering of the cross was not merely physical, but the torment of bearing God’s judgment for sin, we must also not minimize that Jesus felt the full impact of every blow in His humanity. There is no suffering you endure due the impact of sin in this world that Jesus cannot identify with.

2. **Through the cross Jesus demonstrates the righteousness of full obedience to His Father** (Mt 27:34, 48).

You’ll recall that as Jesus anticipated the cross in Gethsemane, He referred to His suffering as a cup, an Old Testament reference to God’s judgment. When they arrive at Golgotha in vs. 34, Jesus is offered a drink of wine mixed with gall which made it bitter. This was a cruel gesture. After scourging and struggling to carry one’s cross to the place of execution, a prisoner would be exhausted and dehydrated, yet was offered something offensively bitter to drink. Some scholars also suggest that the myrrh or gall was thought to be a primitive sedative that would help stupefy the prisoner

to prevent less struggling as he was nailed to his cross.¹ But when Jesus tasted it, he refused it. He did not struggle against those who crucified him but laid down his life willingly. Furthermore, I believe it's significant that Jesus, in drinking the Father's cup, refused to drink anything that would dull the pain or cloud His mind. He would drink every drop of the Father's cup with a clear mind to keep His focus on His Father. When we compare Matthew to John's account of the crucifixion, we know that it was not until after Jesus cried out, "It is finished," that He said "I thirst" and received the drink of sour wine that we read about later in vs. 48. Jesus allowed nothing to minimize the full impact of Father's wrath on our sin.

Yet there is something more in vs. 34. Mark says that the wine was mixed with myrrh while Matthew uses the term gall to draw our attention to Ps 69:20-21: "Reproach has broken my heart and I am so sick. And I looked for sympathy but there was none, and for comforters but I found none. They also gave me gall for my food and for my thirst they have me vinegar to drink." Earlier Psalm 69 says, "*zeal for Your house consumed me—* remember just a few days earlier, Jesus had cleansed the temple—then the Psalmist goes on to say, "***and the reproaches of those who reproach You have fallen on me***" (9). Beloved our reproaches against God fell on Christ as He drank the bitter cup of God's wrath for our sin!

3. **Through the cross Jesus embodies the epitome of righteous suffering (Mt 27:35-36).**

[35-36] Here's where we see God's hand of providence so clearly. The Roman soldiers who gambled for Jesus' clothing were simply acting out of selfish interest and making sport at Jesus' expense. What they did not know is that they were acting out the very specific imagery of Ps 22:16-19 which not only foreshadows the cross more than any other OT passage, but also focuses on the sufferings of one who is truly righteous: "*For dogs have surrounded me; A band of evildoers has encompassed me; **They pierced my hands and my feet.** I can count all my bones. They look, they stare at me. **They divide my garments among them, And for my clothing they cast lots.** But Thou, O LORD, be not far off.*" Unbeknownst to them, these soldiers are declaring and confirming by their actions that Jesus is indeed God's

righteous One.

4. **Through the cross Jesus is presented as the King of the Jews (Mt 27:37).**

Again, we see the providence of God in vs. 37 as they fasten a placard to the cross with the charge against Jesus: "THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS." Pilate meant for this to serve two reasons. First it was a deterrent against anyone who would challenge the authority of Rome. But we are also given the impression from John 19:19-22 that Pilate meant for this title to be an offensive jab to the Jews. Yet by God's hand of providence Pilate wrote more truthfully than he knew, presenting Jesus as their king—not by man's choosing, but by God's (cf. vs. 27-31).

5. **Through the cross Jesus identified with sinners in bearing their sin (Mt 27:38).**

At first vs 38 seems like a mere detail that Jesus was crucified along with two thieves on either side of Him. Yet by God's hand of providence, this scene fulfills the final words of Isaiah 53 (the prophetic picture of Messiah as a Suffering Servant): "He was numbered with the transgressors, yet He Himself bore the sin of many and interceded for the transgressors." What mercy! "All we like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way, but the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him!" (Isa 53:6). Jesus is our sacrificial lamb. What sweet and blessed Providence!

6. **Through the cross Jesus refused to be saved from death to save sinners (Mt 27:39-44).**

Vs. 39-44 record in great detail how Jesus was mocked on the cross. As I read these verses, notice how each of these insults mock Jesus for His seeming inability to save Himself or be saved by God. [39-44]. What these 'Bible' scholars don't recognize is that by mocking Jesus, they were providentially pointing to Jesus as the Savior by using words that linked Him again to Psalm 22:6-8: "*I am...a reproach of men, and despised by the people. All who see me sneer at me; They separate with the lip, **they wag***

¹ John MacArthur, *The MacArthur NT Commentary: Matthew 24-28*, pg. 253-254.

the head, [Mt 27:39] saying, "**Commit yourself to the LORD; let Him deliver him; Let Him rescue him, because He delights in him**"[Mt 27:43]. What they could not see is that by God's providence, the Savior refused to save Himself in order to save sinners.

7. Through the cross Jesus became a curse for us and bore the judgment we deserved (Mt 27:45).

In Gal 3:13, Paul quotes Deut 21:23 to say that Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law for "cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree." So Christ took upon Himself the curse or judgment that belongs to us for breaking God's law. But where do we see that in Matt 27? We see it in the imagery of vs. 45 that parallels some key OT texts. [45] Think back to the 9th plague on Egypt in Exodus 10:21-22. Just before the death of Egypt's first-born, God sent a thick darkness over the land for 3 days—a darkness so intense it could be "felt." The only light was in the Hebrews homes. As a similar sign of judgment, while Jesus was on the cross the sky grew dark for 3 hours from noon to 3pm (this was supernatural, not an eclipse as Passover is during full moon). But notice one difference. While the Hebrews still had light in their homes—sparing God's children the full impact of the plague—at the cross the epicenter of the darkness of judgment fell on Christ, God's own Son. The judgment on the land and its people fell on Christ.

Furthermore, listen to the judgment language of Amos 8:9-10: "*And it will come about in that day,*" declares the Lord God, "*That I shall make **the sun go down at noon** And make **the earth dark in broad daylight.***

*10 "Then I shall turn your **festivals into mourning...and I will make it like a time of mourning for an only son....***

Beloved, Jesus bore the dark epicenter of God's judgment for us. As we are about to see, it was in the darkest hour of God's wrath that Jesus cried out, "My God, My God why have you forsaken Me?"

8. Through the cross Jesus was forsaken so we need never be forsaken by God (Mt 27:46-49).

Jesus' cry of anguish in vs. 46 is a direct quote of the first line of Ps 22: "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" This is the 3rd time that Mt tethers the cross to Ps 22, a psalm that not only foreshadows the cross but also focuses on the sufferings of one who is truly righteous.² Ps 22 has a two-fold message. It is both a cry of anguish from one suffering unjustly (feeling forsaken even by God), *and* it is a declaration of persistent trust and utter hope in God. [Ps 22:1-5] Beloved, for Jesus to perfect our salvation through His righteousness, He had to cling to the character of His father through the darkest hour. Perhaps this is what Peter meant when He said that Jesus "kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously" (1Pet 2:23).

Here's what we must not miss. Though David *felt* forsaken by God in Ps 22, Jesus *was* forsaken by God on the cross. He bore the wrath of God for our sin—a torment infinitely greater than crucifixion. He was forsaken so that those who trust in Him are reconciled to God, never to be forsaken by Him (Heb 13:5—"I will never leave you nor forsake you").

9. Through the cross Jesus is our Redeemer, having paid in full the debt of our sin (Mt 27:50).

[vs. 50] This is the moment of death. Notice that Jesus "yielded up His spirit"³—a voluntary, sovereign act—He wasn't overcome by death. Jesus said in John 10:18, "No one takes My life from Me. I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again." We know from Jn 19:30 that when Jesus yielded up His spirit, He said the words, "It is finished!" Jesus had fully drunk the Father's cup—all of it! The debt of our sin was paid in full!

² Jewish tradition held that Elijah would come and rescue the righteous in their distress (D.A. Carson, *Expositor's Bible Commentary*: vol. 8, pg. 579.)

³ That is, when Jesus died His human spirit went to the presence of the Father until He was raised, establishing the pattern for all believers ("absent from the body, present with the Lord"—2Cor 5:8).

10. Through the cross Jesus became the only true mediator between God and man (Mt 27:51).

[51] The moment that Jesus died was not serene. It was marked by a violent earthquake that split rocks and opened tombs. It was in the midst of this earthquake that the temple veil (60 feet high, 30 feet wide) was “torn in two from *top* to bottom”—indicating that it was God’s doing. This veil separated the holy place from the most holy place, representative of God’s presence where only the high priest could enter once a year on the Day of Atonement (Heb 9:2-7). According to the book of Hebrews,⁴ the rending of the veil when Jesus died signifies that His blood atoned for sin, that He established a new covenant of grace (replacing the old), and identifies Jesus as the one true mediator between God and man. What this means is that those who by faith are one with Christ, have free and open access to come into the presence of the holy God, reconciled through the blood of Christ! In the words of Hebrews, “Since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, and since we have a great high priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience....Let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and grace to help in time of need.” The nearness of God is ours because He tore the veil!

11. Through the cross Jesus shattered death’s tomb to pave a way to resurrection life (Mt 27:52-53).

[52-53] I think the best way to understand what’s happening here is that the tombs were opened on Friday by the earthquake, but the saints were raised in response to Jesus’ resurrection. The point of these resurrections is to demonstrate that Jesus’s death and resurrection accomplished the same resurrection life for believers. Just as Jesus was raised, so will those who trust in Him. Jesus is the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in Him will live even if he dies (John 11:25).

12. Through the cross Jesus is declared the Son of God (Mt 27:54)!

[54] In a very real sense, vs. 54 is the climax of Mt 27. Jesus has died and the resurrection has not yet taken place, but here we see *the purpose* of Jesus’ death bearing its first fruits in the hearts of some Gentile, Roman soldiers. These men had witnessed many crucifixions, yet has they observed not only the darkness and earthquake, but also the incredible restraint and purity of character through Jesus’ suffering—even praying for the Father to forgive those who did these things—they realized that Jesus was who He claimed to be.

It’s interesting to note that the death of Jesus in Mt 27 is bracketed by the response of Roman soldiers in a way that represents humanity’s two diverging responses the gospel of Jesus Christ. Earlier in vs. 27-31 they mocked Jesus and abused Him, dismissing His claim to kingship as incredulous. All they could ‘see’ in Jesus was weakness, humiliation, and apparent defeat. But now this centurion ‘sees’ Jesus for who He is, the Son of God, and He is overcome with the fear of God. It’s as if the veil is pulled back and he suddenly sees divine providence behind the spectacular and gruesome events of that day.

And it’s on these wings of divine providence that the love of God comes to you today. ***Every detail of the crucifixion of Jesus was turned in the hand of God to bring His redeeming love to undeserving sinners***—including you. By divine providence you are here today to ‘see’ that Jesus is the Son of God, the resurrection and the life, the only mediator between you and God, the one who was forsaken to redeem you and to be your forever living Savior.

Today God’s love calls out to you. God’s love calls out to you to *believe* in Jesus as Son, King, and Savior. God’s love calls out to you to *receive* the full impact of His death and resurrection by receiving *Him* by faith in exchange for the guilt of your sin. God’s love calls out to you to experience the full benefits of life with Him—forgiven, never forsaken, and brought near to God to find mercy and grace to help in every time of need.

Prayer: *The God you have been resisting is a God who not only judges sin, but also a God who forgives, heals, and restores. (John 3:36: He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.)*

⁴ Hebrews 4:16; 6:19-20; 9:11-28; 10:19-22