

SESSION 14

# *Our Savior*

MATTHEW 27:27-31,45-54

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



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.

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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

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 nighttime 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. Only Matthew includes that Judas committed suicide by hanging himself. Luke mentioned it in the book of Acts (Acts 1:18-19).

The priests who 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.



**27** Then the **governor's soldiers** **A** took Jesus into the governor's residence and gathered the whole company around him. **28** They stripped him and **dressed him** **B** in a scarlet robe. **29** 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!**" **C** **30** Then they spat on him, took the staff, and kept hitting him on the head. **31** After they had mocked him, they stripped him of the robe, put his own clothes on him, and led him away to crucify him. [ . . . ] **45** From noon until three in the afternoon, **darkness** **D** came over the whole land. **46** About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "**Elí, Elí, lemá sabach-tháni?**" **E** that is, "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?" **47** When some of those standing there heard this, they said, "He's calling for **Elijah.**" **F** **48** Immediately one of them ran and got a sponge, filled it with sour wine, put it on a stick, and offered him a drink. **49** But the rest said, "Let's see if Elijah comes to save him." **50** But Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and **gave up his spirit.** **G** **51** Suddenly, the **curtain of the sanctuary** **H** was torn in two from top to bottom, the earth quaked, and the rocks were split. **52** The tombs were also opened and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised. **53** And they came out of the tombs after his resurrection, entered the holy city, and appeared to many. **54** 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!**" **I**

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**A.** This cohort of Roman soldiers could have been as large as six hundred men.

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**B.** To humiliate Jesus, the soldiers used a robe, a crown of thorns, and a staff (vv. 28-29). Each was a parody of royal trappings.

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**C.** The Romans used the title as a joke. Yet, it was true in a way they didn't know (Matt. 27:11,42).

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**D.** Darkness in the middle of the day. Many scholars compare it to the darkness of God's judgment against Egypt (Ex. 10:21-23).

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**E.** See Psalm 22:1. Jesus's words are quoted in Aramaic. His cry expresses the isolation He felt as sin separated Him from His Father.

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**F.** Some in the crowd thought Jesus was calling for Elijah to rescue Him. Legend stated that Elijah could come to aid those who were suffering.

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**G.** Idiom for physical death. Jesus maintained control, even to the moment of His passing.

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**H.** This thick curtain limited access to the holy of holies. This, along with an earthquake and the raising of the dead (vv. 51-53), were additional supernatural signs.

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**I.** The centurion's confession mirrored that of the disciples (Matt. 16:16) and foreshadowed the gospel being received by both Jews and Gentiles.

# EXPLORE THE TEXT

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## 1. Mocked

(Matt. 27:27-31)

Jesus's willingness to endure the shame and humiliation of crucifixion leads us to humble surrender and praise.

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

## 2. Forsaken

(Matt. 27:45-49)

We can be confident in knowing that Jesus's death was part of God's redemptive plan.

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

## 3. Son of God

(Matt. 27:50-54)

The crucifixion of Jesus calls for the response of faith.

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

## Apply the Text

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?**

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### 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.)

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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.



## DAILY EXPLORATION



### Day 1: Matthew 27:27-31

**Compare verse 29 to *Philippians 2:10-11* and *Revelation 19:16*.**

The “whole company” of the “governor’s soldiers” was six hundred strong. They would have accompanied Pilate from his residence in Caesarea on the Mediterranean Sea. They all joined in mocking Jesus. Picking up on the charge against Jesus that He claimed to be the King of the Jews, they stripped Him of His clothing, and put “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 make-shift scepter. With this they began verbally abusing Him and crying out “Hail, king of the Jews!” 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 (Matt. 20:19). All of this happened in addition to the severe flogging (27:26). Punishment by flogging was brutal in and of itself.

**Thank Jesus for what He was willing to endure on your behalf that day.**



### Day 2: Matthew 27:45-46

**Reflect on the meaning of Jesus’s cry in verse 46.**

In verse 45, Matthew’s focus turned to the last three hours of Jesus’s life. Around noon the sky became unnaturally dark. This was reminiscent of the darkness in Egypt during the first deliverance of God’s people (Ex. 10:22-23).

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.

**How does Jesus’s cry on the cross point to the greatness of your sin?**



### Day 3: Matthew 27:47-49

#### **Compare verse 47 to Malachi 4:5.**

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. The Aramaic word for "God" (*Eli*, v. 46) sounds similar to the name "Elijah." 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."

**The onlookers misunderstood Jesus's cry from the cross. In what ways do people still misunderstand what Jesus did on the cross?**



### Day 4: Matthew 27:50-51

#### **Note the symbolism of the curtain being torn from top to bottom.**

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." When the spiritual battle was complete—the sins of the world were atoned for—Jesus voluntarily gave up His spirit to His Father (see John 10:18).

A second phenomenal act of God while Jesus was on the cross was the tearing of "the curtain of the sanctuary." 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 (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.

**What evidence in these verses indicates that Jesus was still in control?**



## Day 5: Matthew 27:52-54

### *Highlight the centurion's confession.*

Obviously, the earthquake opened tombs. Though the tombs were opened during the earthquake, this select group of 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.

What was significant about a select few being raised because of the death of Jesus? 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!

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 news of 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.”

**How do all the events of this day point to Jesus’s identity?**

## APPLY THE TEXT

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 you discovered that you should share with someone else?

## JOURNAL

