

Matthew's Account of Our Lord's Crucifixion

Matthew 27:27-44

Matthew 27:27-44 - *"Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole garrison around Him. ²⁸ And they stripped Him and put a scarlet robe on Him. ²⁹ When they had twisted a crown of thorns, they put it on His head, and a reed in His right hand. And they bowed the knee before Him and mocked Him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" ³⁰ Then they spat on Him, and took the reed and struck Him on the head. ³¹ And when they had mocked Him, they took the robe off Him, put His own clothes on Him, and led Him away to be crucified.*

³² Now as they came out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name. Him they compelled to bear His cross. ³³ And when they had come to a place called Golgotha, that is to say, Place of a Skull, ³⁴ they gave Him sour wine mingled with gall to drink. But when He had tasted it, He would not drink. ³⁵ Then they crucified Him, and divided His garments, casting lots, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet: " They divided My garments among them, And for My clothing they cast lots." ³⁶ Sitting down, they kept watch over Him there. ³⁷ And they put up over His head the accusation written against Him: THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS.

³⁸ Then two robbers were crucified with Him, one on the right and another on the left. ³⁹ And those who passed by blasphemed Him, wagging their heads ⁴⁰ and saying, "You who destroy the temple and build it in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross."

⁴¹ Likewise the chief priests also, mocking with the scribes and elders, said, ⁴² "He saved others; Himself He cannot save. If He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him." ⁴³ He trusted in God; let Him deliver Him now if He will have Him; for He said, 'I am the Son of God.'"

⁴⁴ Even the robbers who were crucified with Him reviled Him with the same thing."

Background Notes

Pilate probably stayed at the Praetorium when he was in Jerusalem, and it was the place of our Lord's trial before Pilate (v27). The Praetorium was located either in the Fortress of Antonia, at the northwest end of the Temple complex, or it was located in Herod's palace on the west side of the ancient city of Jerusalem. The Fortress of Antonia is the traditional site for the Praetorium. This area has been excavated by archeologists, and many believe that the Roman foundation floor that was uncovered there is the "*Gabbatha*" ("Pavement") that is mentioned in John 19:13.

The traditional Via Dolorosa (Way of Sorrows) begins at this pavement and makes its way, with a number of designated stops, to the traditional Calvary. However, the path of the Via Dolorosa is only a tradition. The route was established many years after the death of our Lord.

In fact, even the exact site of Calvary is not known with certainty. The traditional site is located within the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. An alternate site, known as Gordon's Calvary, is on the north side of the city, just outside the Damascus Gate of the Old City of Jerusalem. Most likely the location of Calvary is one of these two sites, but we can't be sure. " *And when they had come to a place called Golgotha, that is to say, Place of a Skull...*" (v33). The word "Calvary," by the way, is the Latin word for skull, and *Golgotha* is the Aramaic word for skull. It was called "the place of the skull" either because it was a place for executions and death, or because a nearby cliff face looked like a skull – or maybe both.

Doctrinal Points

1. The crucifixion fulfilled the prophecies of Scripture.

"Then they crucified Him, and divided His garments, casting lots, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet: "They divided My garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots" (v35).

Psalms 22 is one of the great Messianic Psalms. This detail of the crucifixion was prophesied about the coming Messiah in Psalm 22:18: "They divided My garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots." Verse 39, "And those who passed by blasphemed Him, wagging their heads" is the fulfillment of the Messianic prophecy of Psalm 22:7: "All those who see Me ridicule Me. They shoot out the lip, they shake the head." And verse 43, "He trusted in God; let Him deliver Him" is the fulfillment of Psalm 22:8.

Even the Lord's death by crucifixion is predicted in Psalm 22:16: "The congregation of the wicked has enclosed Me. They pierced My hands and My feet..." This psalm was written hundreds of years before the coming of the Roman Empire and the previously unknown practice of crucifixion that pierced the hands and the feet. Under Jewish law, the death penalty was stoning. But Psalm 22:16 says, "...They pierced My hands and My feet." Down through the years, Jewish scholars and liberal scholars have debated the translation of this verse because it obviously points to Jesus and His crucifixion. They like to refer to it as a "Christian translation"! However, the most recent examination of the Dead Sea Scrolls, which includes Psalm 22, supports the translation that we just read: "they pierced My hand and My feet."

The prophecies of Psalm 22 were fulfilled at the time of the crucifixion, and many other Old Testament Messianic prophecies were fulfilled as well. Listen to the suffering servant prophecy of Isaiah 50:6, "I gave My back to those who struck Me, and My cheeks to those who plucked out the beard; I did not hide My face from shame and spitting." This prophecy fulfilled in Matthew 27:30: "Then they spat on Him, and took the reed and struck Him on the head" What vile and cruel treatment of the Son of God!

In Matthew 27:34 we see the fulfillment of the Messianic prophecy of Psalm 69:21 "...for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink." Our Lord refused the fermented drink that was offered to Him because He wanted to be in complete control of His

senses, even during awful ordeal of crucifixion. In addition, in Matthew 27 we see the fulfillment of many of the Suffering Servant predictions of Isaiah 52 and 53.

So we have the fulfillment of many prophecies here in Matthew 27. The crucifixion fulfilled the prophecies of Scripture.

2. The crucifixion revealed the hearts of people.

The Romans usually crucified people in a very public place. They wanted this awful punishment to be observed by the maximum number of people, as a deterrent to criminal activity or insurrection against Rome. So a number of people observed the crucifixion of our Lord. The behavior and comments of the people who were present revealed the true condition of their hearts before God.

First, there were the hardened Roman soldiers who mocked the Lord and made sport of Him. They gambled to see who would get His garments, and then they sat down and watched the crucifixion (v36). How cruel and heartless! There are many people like that today who mock and joke about the Lord. They are unmoved by the events of our Lord's crucifixion. They don't kneel and worship at the cross -- they just sit and watch. They are indifferent and unresponsive to God's love for them.

It's a relief to read about the Roman centurion and his men's reaction when the Lord died: "*When the centurion and those with him, who were guarding Jesus, saw the earthquake and the things that had happened, they feared greatly, saying, 'Truly this was the Son of God!'*" (v54). They had a change of heart! It's possible that some of them became true believers.

Another group observing the crucifixion consisted of people who were passing by along the road outside Jerusalem: "*And those who passed by blasphemed Him, wagging their heads...*" (v39). These people were Jews who had heard Jesus preach, because they reminded the Lord that He had said, "*Destroy this temple, and in three days I will build it up.*" Clearly they were saying this in a scornful way ("*wagging their heads*"). There are many scornful unbelievers today. They know that Jesus claimed to be the Son of God, and they know there's evidence for His resurrection, but they scoff at what they call "religious nonsense." They maintain a stance of contemptuous unbelief.

Then there were the two thieves who were crucified with the Lord. At first they were in this scornful category: "*Even the robbers who were crucified with Him reviled Him with the same thing*" (v44). However, from Luke's Gospel we know that one of these thieves repented and put his trust in the Lord Jesus. So there is hope, even for scornful unbelievers. If they repent and believe, God is gracious!

There was another group observing the crucifixion - the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders of the people (v41). These religious leaders should have been guiding the people in the Scriptures and pointing them to the Messiah, but they were unbelieving skeptics. Like many people today, they said that they wanted to see proof - and **then** they would believe! *"If He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him"* (v42). Do you think that they would have believed if the Lord had actually come down from the cross? No. Of course not! They didn't want to believe, and they would simply have found another reason not to believe. The same attitude can be found today. People who are "convinced against their will are of the same opinion still."

As it was then, so it is today: the crucifixion reveals the hearts of people. Only true Christians believe that the crucifixion involved the death of the Son of God as the Sacrifice for the sins of the world. Where do you stand in reference to the death of Jesus Christ on the cross? Have you believed that the Lord Jesus Christ died on the cross as the Substitute for your sins? Have you trusted in Him as your Savior?

Practical Application

Remember Simon of Cyrene!

"Now as they came out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name. Him they compelled to bear His cross" (v32).

Cyrene was a city in northern Africa, where there was a Jewish community. Simon was probably a Jew who had made the long trip to Jerusalem for the celebration of the Passover. He had no idea that the Roman soldiers would pick him out of the crowd that day, and force him to carry the cross of Jesus to the place of crucifixion. As Simon was bearing that heavy load, he was probably thinking that he just happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time!

But - in the plan and will of God - Simon of Cyrene was in the **right** place at the **right** time to help the Lord! What a wonderful privilege he had! Tradition says that Simon of Cyrene became a believer, and his two sons Alexander and Rufus (mentioned in Mark 15) also became believers.

In God's plan for our lives, we never know what a day will bring forth. Let's not forget the lessons that we see here. Remember Simon of Cyrene!