

Matthew 27.32–44

The Man who Would Not Save Himself

“Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by? Look and see if there is any sorrow like my sorrow, which was brought upon me, which the LORD inflicted on the day of his fierce anger.”
Lamentations 1.12

Where do you go to find kings today? Most Replaced by Presidents or Dictators
Still, a few Kings are left, if you find them anywhere, in King’s House, Palace
2016 Person most Widely Honored as KING in World Today is Jesus Christ
Does Not Look REGAL in this Portrait of Him Matthew presents chapter 27
MOCKED as a King, MURDERED as a CRIMINAL

Hanging on a cross of rough wood, beaten, bleeding, mocked, and left to die.
Cross so Horrible Romans refused allow Citizens Crucified, No Matter Crime

“It is a crime to put a Roman citizen in chains, it is an enormity to flog one, sheer murder to slay one; what, then, shall I say of crucifixion? It is impossible to find the word for such an abomination... a most cruel and disgusting punishment... Let the very mention of the cross be far removed not only from a Roman citizen’s body, but from his mind, his eyes, his ears.” Cicero (106–43 B.C.)

“There was no word for it. No polite word, at any rate, for the word for ‘cross’ was taboo in Roman society.”
Philip Ryken

Romans worried about INCREDIBLE PAIN of the Cross....THEY Perfected!
JEWS feared its ENORMOUS SHAME...Public Declaration of God’s CURSE

“If a man guilty of a capital offense is put to death and his body is hung on a tree, you must not leave his body on the tree overnight. Be sure to bury him that same day, because anyone who is hung on a tree is under God’s curse.” Deuteronomy 21.22–23

To the JEWS > Crucified Person – Men & Women - Abandoned by God

REASON Why Jesus was Crucified Outside Jerusalem

Leviticus 24.14

Numbers 15.35,36

1 Kings 21.13

Acts 7.58

Hebrews 13.13

The act was so offensive to the Jews that they would not allow it to take place within the sacred precincts of their city.

Early Christians Knew All this > Often spoke of Jesus Hanged on a Tree
Deuteronomy see Acts 5:30; 10:39; 13:29; Gal. 3:13; 1 Peter 2:24

Yet they were not ashamed of Christ's cross. Nor are we!

We do not Hesitate to let Everyone Know that Jesus Died in This Way

Galatians 6.14

Crosses mark our Graveyards, Churches, and Hang around our Necks

Why this remarkable transformation?

Because Christians know that it was by crucifixion on a cross that Jesus took the curse of God for our sin on himself.

Paul made this explicit when he wrote, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree' " (Gal. 3:13).

The cross is not our shame but our glory, which is why we sing,

In the cross of Christ I glory,
Towering o'er the wrecks of time;
All the light of sacred story
Gathers round its head sublime.

Simon of Cyrene

None of the Gospels describes the actual crucifixion in detail.

The details were well known; there was no point in dwelling on its horrors.

But the Gospels do tell in general terms what happened.

Matthew begins by telling of a man from the North African town of Cyrene who was drafted by the soldiers to carry Jesus' cross. His name was Simon.

A condemned person usually carried his own cross, but Jesus must have been too weakened from his scourging and beatings to do it.

Jesus carried his cross from the Praetorium to the gates of the city, but when he staggered, the soldiers seized the first able-bodied man they could find, who just happened to be Simon.

Simon is an interesting person. Mark calls him the father of Alexander and Rufus (Mark 15:21), who may be the persons referred to in Acts 19:33 (Alexander) and Romans 16:13 (Rufus).

The sons must have been known by the church to which Mark wrote or he would not have had a reason to mention them.

Cyrene is mentioned in Acts 2:10; 6:9; 11:20; and 13:1.

William Barclay considers this one of the great "hidden romances" of the New Testament.

Simon was a Jew who, like all Jews, would have hated the Romans.

To be pressed into service by a Roman soldier and forced to carry the cross of a condemned man must have been a bitter experience for him.

But something important may have happened to Simon that day. Instead of merely flinging down the cross at Golgotha, Simon may have been struck by the person of Jesus, stayed to watch the crucifixion, and either then or shortly afterward been converted.

After the Passover he would have returned to Cyrene and may have told his family about Jesus. It is not unlikely that the family became Christians through his testimony.

William Barclay goes further, remembering that it was “men from Cyprus and Cyrene” who came to Antioch and first preached the gospel to the Gentile world (Acts 11:20).

Was Simon one of the men from Cyrene? Was Rufus with him?

In Ephesus, a riot is instigated by people who served Diana of the Ephesians, and the crowd would have killed Paul if they could have gotten to him. Who stands out to face the mob? A man called Alexander (Acts 19:33).

And when Paul sends greetings to the Christians in Rome in the last chapter of Romans, two of the people he addresses are “Rufus ... and his mother” (Rom 16:13). Are these the same people? We do not know. Simon, Alexander, and Rufus were common names. But stranger histories have unfolded. These events may have happened as a result of an apparently chance encounter between Simon and Jesus on the road to Calvary.

The Crucifixion

If Simon remained by the cross that day, he would have witnessed the aspects of the crucifixion that Matthew reports.

There are six of them, and most are fulfillments of specific Old Testament prophecies, mostly from Psalms.

Matthew frequently cites Old Testament passages that Jesus fulfilled, but surprisingly, he does not call attention to them specifically.

1. “*Wine ... mixed with gall*” (v. 34). Each of the Gospels contains a reference to this, but it is likely that two different acts were involved. Matthew and Mark describe an offer that Jewish sources say was customarily made by wealthy women of the city as a compassionate attempt to deaden pain. They offered the victim wine mixed with gall. This drink was offered at the start of the crucifixion, and Matthew and Mark both say that Jesus refused to drink it, presumably to experience the fullness of his suffering and retain a clear mind to the end. John seems to refer to something the soldiers did later. He reports that when Jesus said, “I am thirsty” (in order to fulfill Ps. 69:21), the soldiers soaked a sponge in cheap wine, put it on a staff, and lifted it to his mouth, and that this time Jesus took

what was offered. This happened at the end of his ordeal, for immediately after this, Jesus said, “It is finished,” and gave up his spirit (John 19:28–30).

2. *Gambling for Christ’s clothes* (v. 35). Each of the Gospels reports how the soldiers divided Christ’s clothing, though John alone explains that the gambling was actually only for Christ’s seamless outer robe. John is also the only one who says specifically that this was to fulfill Psalm 22:18, which says, “They divided my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing” (see John 19:24). A few Greek manuscripts of Matthew include this verse, but it seems to be a late addition made to conform Matthew’s text to that of John.

3. *The written charge against Jesus* (v. 37).

Each of the Gospels also records this detail, though they vary in the actual wording of the placard. Matthew states, “This is Jesus, the king of the Jews.” Mark writes, “The king of the Jews” (15:26). Luke reports the words as: “This is the king of the Jews” (23:38). John, who has the fullest version, writes: “Jesus of Nazareth, the king of the Jews” (19:19).

Bible students have wrestled with these slight variations, trying to reconcile them, but the effort is unnecessary in my judgment.

Some suggest that since the words were in “Aramaic, Latin and Greek,” according to John 19:20, the Gospels translate different languages. That is unlikely.

What we have are probably partial reports. The full text might have read, “This is Jesus of Nazareth, the king of the Jews.”

The important thing is that Jesus was killed for claiming to be the Messiah, which is exactly what he was. He was rejected as king by both the Jews and Romans, but he lives today as the only true ruler of all people, whether Jew or Gentile, bond or free, male or female. Jesus is indeed the King of kings and Lord of all.

4. *“Two robbers ... with him”* (vv. 38, 44).

Each of the Gospels also reports that two others were crucified at the same time, though only the first three call them robbers and only Luke reports the conversion of one.

Robber is the same word that was used to describe Barabbas (*leistes*), and it probably means more than just “thief.”

The word refers to what we would call a guerrilla soldier or revolutionary and probably suggests that those who were crucified along with Jesus were Barabbas’s companions.

This is more than likely because stealing was not a capital offense.

Was Barabbas intended for the cross in the center? Probably. If so, Jesus literally took his place, just as in a figurative sense he took the place of all who believe on him and trust him alone for their salvation.

Luke explains that both robbers cursed Jesus along with everyone else, but one eventually settled down and rebuked his friend: “Don’t you fear God, since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.” Then, turning to the Lord, he pled, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” Jesus replied, “I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:39–43).

What a wonderful promise! One Bible student said, “One thief was saved so that no one might despair, but only one so that no one might presume.”

None of the Gospels refers to Isaiah 53:12 at this point, but it is difficult not to think of these strange circumstances as its fulfillment. Isaiah wrote, “He poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors.”

5. Insults from those passing by (vv. 39–40).

The insults of those who were passing by seem to have fulfilled Psalm 22:7: “All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads.”

It is a sorry observation on our corrupt natures that people are seldom more heartless than when they see another person suffering, as Jesus was.

6. Mocking by the chief priests, teachers of the law, and elders (vv. 41–43).

Reference to these three groups of people indicates that they were members of the Sanhedrin, the very body that had arrested, tried, and then condemned the Lord. They challenged him to have God deliver him, unwittingly fulfilling the taunt of Psalm 22:8: “He trusts in the LORD; let the LORD rescue him. Let him deliver him, since he delights in him.”

He Died for You

That is the straightforward account, but this is where we have to stop and go back over it in our mind, remembering what Jesus did for us. Can we imagine it?

Perhaps we can think of a lacerated body bleeding from head to foot.

His form is so marred that he is hardly recognizable, even to his friends.

No representation of Jesus’ crucifixion that I have ever seen, even by the greatest of artists, does justice to this horror. They are all too clean, too sterile.

The crucifixion was bloody and vulgar, ugly and repulsive.

Yet he was the Son of God! Think of that and try to understand something of the horror of your sin and of the grace, love, mercy, and compassion of our God.

Do you understand that it was for you that Jesus endured this?

And not just as an example of how to endure great suffering.

Jesus endured the agonies of the cross in your place.

The cross was God’s punishment for your sins, and when Jesus cried out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” it was for you that his eternally ancient bond with the Father was broken.

We find this theme again and again in the Bible.

“He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed” (1 Peter 2:24).

“Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God” (1 Peter 3:18).

“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor. 5:21).

“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us” (Gal. 3:13).

“Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people” (Heb. 9:28).

Best of all perhaps, this great text from Isaiah:

But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. 53:5–6

Was he scourged? It was that “through his stripes we might be healed.” Was he condemned, though innocent? It was that we might be acquitted, though guilty. Did he wear a crown of thorns? It was that we might wear the crown of glory. Was he stripped of his raiment? It was that we might be clothed in everlasting righteousness. Was he mocked and reviled? It was that we might be honored and blessed. Was he reckoned a malefactor, and numbered among transgressors? It was that we might be reckoned innocent, and justified from all sin. Was he declared unable to save himself? It was that he might be able to save others to the uttermost. Did he die at last, and that the most painful and disgraceful of deaths? It was that we might live for evermore, and be exalted to the highest glory.

Bishop John Ryle

Let us remember these things and never forget them.

Substitution! A vicarious atonement! These texts and the doctrines they express are the very foundation of the gospel.

The Mocking

All the Gospels tell about Jesus’ crucifixion, of course, for it is the chief point of their narratives.

But each also contains its own special emphasis, and the mocking of Jesus seems to be the dominant note in Matthew.

The paragraphs we are studying contain thirteen verses, but five of them are about the taunts of those passing by and of the leaders. The last verse even adds that the robbers “also heaped insults on him” (v. 44).

The interesting thing about these insults is that they were all highly ironic.

The first was about Jesus’ claim to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days. This accusation had been raised at his trial, but the leaders had been unable to prove it by the strict standards of Jewish legal procedure. Yet Jesus had said it, and the accusation seemed to have been floating among the people. “You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!” (v. 40).

They ridiculed him for his words, but it was by his death that he was destroying the temple of his body, and it was by his resurrection that he would raise it again.

The leaders did not address Jesus directly. They spoke to one another, probably to show their scorn for him: “He saved others, but he can’t save himself! He’s the King of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, ‘I am the Son of God’ ” (vv. 41–43).

Ironically, they used the words that Satan had used in two of his temptations of the Lord, recorded in Matthew 4: “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread” (v. 3) and, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down” (v. 6). They were saying the same thing now: “If you are the Son of God, ask God to save you!”

“They thought they were so clever but the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom. Precisely by voluntarily going to the cross, Jesus *was* destroying “this temple”—the temple of his body—and in three days it *would* be “rebuilt.”

D. A. Carson

And precisely because he *was* the Son of God, he would *not* come down from the cross!

Similar double irony extended to all the mockery he endured. “He saved others ... but he can’t save himself!” (27:42) they taunted.

At one level, they were questioning the legitimacy and reality of his claims. Surely the *real* Messiah would not be forced to bear such shame and suffering. But at a deeper level, the taunt was largely right. If the Lord Jesus was to save others, he *had* to sacrifice himself, and he *could not* save himself.

Surely God’s wisdom is beyond our understanding. We would never have thought up a gospel like this, but this is true Christianity. Jesus died for us because without that death we could not be saved. To God be the glory!

Matthew 27.32 As they went out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name. They compelled this man to carry his cross. 33 And when they came to a place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull), 34 they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall, but when he tasted it, he would not drink it. 35 And when they had crucified him, they divided his garments among them by casting lots. 36 Then they sat down and kept watch over him there. 37 And over his head they put the charge against him, which read, “This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.” 38 Then two robbers were crucified with him, one on the right and one on the left. 39 And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads 40 and saying, “You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross.” 41 So also the chief priests, with the scribes and elders, mocked him, saying, 42 “He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. 43 He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him. For he said, ‘I am the Son of God.’” 44 And the robbers who were crucified with him also reviled him in the same way.