

The Gospel of Matthew

Lesson 37: The Crucifixion -- Matthew 27:27-56

We come now to the center of everything. For thirty-six lessons we have watched Jesus heal, teach, confront, and call. Every road has been bending toward this hill. Matthew slows down and walks us through it with terrible, holy restraint. He does not linger on the gore; he simply lets the facts fall, one after another, until the weight of them settles on us. The soldiers strip Him. They twist a crown of thorns and press it onto His head. They put a staff in His hand, kneel in mockery, and sneer, "Hail, king of the Jews!" (27:29). Then they spit on Him, strike Him, and lead Him out to die.

Read slowly the procession to the place called Golgotha, which means the Place of the Skull. They nail Him to the cross and gamble for His clothing at His feet. Above His head they fix the charge against Him: "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews." They mean it as ridicule. It is the simple truth. And from every side the mockery rises. Passersby hurl insults and wag their heads. The chief priests and elders jeer, "He saved others, but he can't save himself!" (27:42). They do not realize they are speaking the deepest logic of the cross: He would not save Himself, precisely because He had come to save others.

Then, at noon, the sky goes dark. For three hours, darkness covers the land (27:45), as if creation itself cannot bear to watch, as if the lights of heaven are dimmed over the death of the Son. And out of that darkness comes the most wrenching cry in all of Scripture: "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (27:46). Here is mystery we approach on our knees. The sinless Son, who had never known a moment apart from the Father, now bears our sin and tastes our God-forsakenness in our place, so that we would never have to.

And then the dying. Jesus cries out again with a loud voice and gives up His spirit (27:50). At that instant the great curtain of the temple, the thick veil that had sealed off the Most Holy Place for centuries, is torn in two from top to bottom (27:51). God Himself rips open the barrier between heaven and earth. The earth shakes, rocks split, tombs break open. And a hardened Roman centurion, who has seen many men die, looks at how this Man died and says the truest words spoken all day: "Surely he was the Son of God!" (27:54). The cross looks like the end. It is the hinge of the world.

Group Discussion: Standing at the cross, the chief priests mocked, "He saved others, but he can't save himself," without realizing they were describing the very heart of what Jesus was doing. Why do you think it matters so much that Jesus would not save Himself but chose to die for others instead?

Personal Reflection: Jesus endured mockery, abandonment, and the crushing weight of our sin so that we would never have to face God-forsakenness ourselves. When you really sit with the

truth that He did this in your place, what does it stir in you, and is there any part of your heart that still holds Him at arm's length?

Read Matthew 27:27-56

Study Questions

1. The soldiers and the crowd mocked Jesus as a powerless, failed king, jeering, "He saved others, but he can't save himself!" (27:42). What were they unknowingly revealing about the true nature of His kingship and His mission?
2. It would have taken only a word for Jesus to call down deliverance, yet He stayed on the cross out of love for us. Where in your life is God calling you to lay down your own rights or comfort for the good of someone else?
3. From noon until three, "darkness came over all the land" as Jesus hung dying (27:45). What is the significance of this darkness, and what does it tell us about the seriousness of what was happening on the cross?
4. The cross confronts us with how costly our sin is to God. How does looking honestly at what your sin cost Jesus change the way you think about the sins you are tempted to treat as small?
5. Jesus cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (27:46). What was happening in that cry, and how can the eternal Son experience God-forsakenness while remaining the beloved Son?
6. Jesus tasted abandonment so that we would never be finally abandoned by God. When you feel most alone or forsaken, how does His cry from the cross speak to you in that place?

7. At the moment Jesus died, the temple curtain “was torn in two from top to bottom” (27:51). What did that veil represent, and what is God declaring by tearing it open at the death of His Son?
8. Because the veil is torn, you now have open access to draw near to God through Christ. Are you actually living in that nearness, or are you keeping your distance from God as if the curtain were still hanging?
9. Watching how Jesus died, a hardened Roman centurion confessed, “Surely he was the Son of God!” (27:54). Drawing together the mockery, the darkness, the cry of forsakenness, and the torn veil, what does the cross mean, what did Christ’s death actually accomplish, and how does the New Testament say we come to receive it?
10. Look back over this whole scene at Golgotha. Name one specific way the cross of Christ is reshaping your heart this week, whether your view of sin, your sense of God’s nearness, or your gratitude for the One who died in your place.

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Psalm 22:1–18, the prophetic cry of the forsaken sufferer, His pierced hands and feet and divided garments; Isaiah 53:4–6, the servant wounded for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities; Hebrews 10:19–22, the new and living way opened through the torn veil of Christ’s body; 2 Corinthians 5:21, God making the sinless One to be sin for us; Romans 5:8–9, God proving His love in that Christ died for us while we were still sinners.