



Matthew 27:1-61

The Cross of Jesus

In the 18th century England young boys learned to master the sea early in life.

John was only seven when his mother died and he was turned over by his father to relatives to rear.

When he was eleven his father who was a master of a ship in the Mediterranean trade routes took him on a trip with him. From there he became an apprentice seaman and joined the British navy.

He was so undisciplined that he deserted the Navy and was soon arrested, publicly beaten and demoted. Because he couldn't stand the navy's discipline, he deserted, fleeing to Africa so that, in his own words, "I might sin my fill." He soon sank to the depths of vice. "

John got into the slave trade to satisfy his passions. He was demoted once again and worked on the slave owner's plantation as one of the slaves. The woman in command of the trader's harem treated him like an animal. She hit him and forced him to beg in the dirt for his food.

He finally escaped and once again became a shipman. It wasn't long before he was back to his own ways. He got the entire crew drunk. The captain was so incensed he hit John, knocking him overboard. He would have drowned were it not for a sailor who speared him in his thigh with a boat hook and pulled him back on board. The wound left a scar big enough for the man to put his fist in.

Some time later the ship neared the coast of Scotland and encountered a violent storm. John's cabin was filled with seawater and the ship was sinking. The ship's buoyant cargo kept it afloat.

The sailors manned the pumps for nine hours. John still recovering from the spearing overheard a frantic crew member saying they had no chance of survival.

John cried out to God and for the first time in his life –prayed. "If this will not do, the Lord have mercy on us! "

God answered that helpless, wretched cry. The ship did not sink that night. It was a sincere life changing prayer. John remembered it until his death. Each year throughout the rest of his life he observed the anniversary of that most significant event with prayer and fasting.

John Newton emerged from the hold of that ship to become chaplain to England's Parliament and even preach before the king of England. He was referred to as the second founder of the Church of England.

We celebrate his anniversary each time we sing his great hymn:

Amazing grace! How sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see.

To John Newton's ears there was no sweeter sound in the entire world than God's saving grace.

Grace. God gives us what we do not deserve. It is an act of pure love on the part of God for sinful man. It is always unearned, undeserved, opposed to works and absolutely free. It is the free, divine, unmerited and undeserved favor of God to sinful men.

How can a holy and righteous God treat us with such grace?

There is only one answer. It is found at the foot of the cross of Jesus. Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all. That is the result of grace.

For I am determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified (1 Corinthians 2:2).

THE CHARACTER OF JESUS

At the cross we see a great contrast between the holiness of God and the reality of human depravity and sin at its worst. At the cross we see manifest the pure love of God and the hatred of religious leaders.

The character of Jesus revealed

Jesus was led away at the conclusion of six trials during the night. Like a lamb being led away for slaughter we see Jesus as they bound Him, and led Him away, and delivered Him up to Pilate the governor (Mat. 27:2). Jesus fulfilled the words of the prophet Isaiah writing seven hundred years earlier (53:7).

He was oppressed and He was afflicted,
Yet He did not open His mouth;
Like a lamb that is led to slaughter,
And like a sheep that is silent before its shearers,
So He did not open His mouth. ”

Jesus was innocent. Judas who had betrayed him earlier in the night came to his senses and in remorse threw the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders saying, I have sinned by betraying innocent blood (vv. 3-4) and then he went out and hanged himself.

Jesus was totally unintimidated by the accusations of the chief priests and elders. The governor asked him, Are You the King of the Jews? (v. 11) As a

elders. The governor asked him, *Are You the King of the Jews?* (v. 11) As a seasoned military man Pilate took one look at Jesus and knew He was no King of the Jews in a political sense. He knew a terrorist when he saw one and this Galilean was not the kind of leader who could overthrow the Romans. What kind of a king is it that has no soldiers and no financial means of sustaining a government? Here was a Jewish carpenter standing before him. If Jesus said *yes* He would give the Roman governor the idea that He was claiming to be an earthly king, but to say *no* would deny the fact that He was King in the kingdom of God. Jesus was a king, but not in the political sense that Pilate understood it. He avoided political overtones in His answer to Pilate. Jesus is the king of the Jews.

And while He was being accused by the chief priests and elders, He made no answer (v. 12). Pilate was surprised at the silence of Jesus and asked, *Do You not hear how many things they testify against You?* ” Still Jesus did not answer him with regard to a single charge, so that the governor was quite amazed (vv. 13-14). Jesus is in absolute command throughout even though He says hardly a word. Prisoners on trial for their lives would normally have been very vocal and refuted their accusers aggressively.

Even Pilate's superstitious wife sent to him a message while he was in the judgment hall saying, *Have nothing to do with that righteous Man; for last night I suffered greatly in a dream because of Him* (v. 19).

The disciple Simon Peter who witnessed the events that dreadful day later wrote: *For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, whocommitted no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously; and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed* (1 Pet. 2:21-24).

The character of depraved man revealed

If at the cross we see the holy character of Jesus revealed we also see in contrast the human depravity at its worst. Only Romans had the power to put men to death in Judea. The Jewish leaders had to bring Jesus to Roman authorities and manipulate them to accomplish their deceit.

The thing that is hard to comprehend is the fact that these were religious leaders who were instigating the hatred toward Jesus. Now when morning came, all the chief priests and the elders of the people conferred together against Jesus to put Him to death; and they bound Him, and led Him away, and delivered Him up to Pilate the governor (vv. 1-2). These religious leaders planned their strategy to make sure that Jesus would be put to death. They came to their decision during the night to put Jesus to death. By Jewish law the sentencing had to be done in daytime. So the highest Jewish assembly of the land came together to ratify the decision they made during the night. It was a mockery of justice.

These were the best-educated, eminent, politically successful, high minded, moral leaders in the community who met to make their plans on how they would put Jesus to death. But ethically and morally they were rotten at the core. Pilate knew that because of envy they had delivered Jesus up to him (v. 18). They were not concerned with justice but with the execution of Jesus.

With mob action they take charge and manipulate the Roman governor. Pilate thought he could match wits with these deceitful manipulators. He came up with the ingenious idea of saving face by offering to release to the crowd any one prisoner whom they wanted (v. 15). He was holding in prison a notorious prisoner, called

the crowd any one prisoner whom they wanted (v. 15). He was holding in prison a “notorious prisoner, called Barabbas. Pilate thought surely they are sensible, high-minded people who want justice to rule. He offered them a choice. Surely they would choose this innocent man Jesus instead of an insurrectionist.

When therefore they were gathered together, Pilate said to them, Whom do you want me to release for you? Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ? (v. 19).

But the chief priests and the elders persuaded the multitudes to ask for Barabbas, and to put Jesus to death ” (v. 20).

Perhaps it is true that Barabbas name was Jesus Bar Abbas. Although far from unanimous, a number of translators prefer to translate, J̄esus Barabbas. There is manuscript evidence for the name J̄esus Barabbas. ” If it was in the original the scribes may have left it out of their copies out of reverence for Jesus the Messiah. If so the contrast becomes even stronger. Who do you want me to release to you Jesus bar Abbas or Jesus the Messiah?

The crowd shouted, Not Jesus the Messiah, but Jesus bar Abbas. ”

Pilate persisted, Which of the two do you want me to release for you? And they said, Barabbas (v. 21).

Pilate still persistent, trying to get himself off the hook, What then shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ? Then they all yelled, Let Him be crucified! (v. 22).

Pilate responded, Why, what evil has he done? But they kept on shouting all the more, saying, Let Him be crucified! (v. 23). The governor must have thought surely ordinary people would side with Jesus rather than a known criminal like Barabbas. But then the crowd was not left to make up its own mind. The Jewish leaders persuaded the crowd and if it boiled down to a choice between believing a Jewish leader and a Roman governor, Pilate had no chance.

Pilate realized that nothing more could be done. Undoubtedly he had been acting on the assumption that he would have no problem releasing Jesus. The question was decided by mob hysteria. He saw that a riot was breaking out so he took water and washed his hands in front of the multitude, saying, I am innocent of this Man s blood; see to that yourselves (v. 24; cf. Deut. 21:6-9).

And all the people answered sand said, His blood be on us and on our children! (v. 26).

In the Old Testament blood refers to a violent death such as murder or execution. He tries to relieve his own guilt saying, This is something for which you will have to answer. I am not responsible for this man s death. ”

Pilate released Barabbas and turned Jesus the Messiah over to be crucified. As Pilate had done on previous occasions he caved in to the pressures of the Jewish leaders.

THE CRUCIFIXION OF JESUS

Then he released Barabbas for them; but after having Jesus scourged, he handed Him over to be crucified ” (v. 26). And when they had crucified Him . . . (v. 35).

The crucifixion took place at Golgotha, translated the place of the skull perhaps because it took the shape of a skull off in the distance. The word Calvary comes through the Latin *calvaria*, meaning skull.

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Physical suffering of Jesus

The first step to the crucifixion was a thorough scourging of the victim. The scourging or whipping itself was a brutal form of torture. The scourge reduced the body to raw inflamed flesh and a bleeding mass. Men died under the scourge, lost their reason, few remained conscious to the end of it. Before delivering Jesus over to crucifixion they scourged Him. This was a terrible torture in itself. The victim was stripped; his hands were tied so he was bent double and tied to a short post. The lash was a long leather tong, studded at intervals with sharp pieces of bone, pellets of lead, pieces of sharp glass and fish hooks.

The crucifixion was the most terrible and cruel death which man has ever devised for taking vengeance on his fellowman. It was the cruelest invention of depraved minds for bringing prolonged, slow, excruciating suffering before death.

The Roman historian Cicero wrote, "Let it never come near the body of a Roman citizen: nay, not even near his thoughts, or eyes, or ears."

Execution by crucifixion goes back to the Persian idolatry. The Persians believed the earth was sacred to their god Ormuzd. For them it was criminal for anyone to be killed on the earth so they lifted the body up above it so as not to defile that which was sacred.

The Phoenicians tried all forms of death to see which was most painful. They experimented with it just like Hitler's doctors, so called, did in World War II. The Phoenicians tried death by stoning, spearing, boiling in oil, strangulations, drowning and burning. These were all too fast.

They chose crucifixion because it was slow, humiliating, painful, and in public view so that it left an indelible warning to everyone who witnessed it. It was the most terrible and violent death ever devised. Cicero said, "It was the most cruel and horrible of tortures."

This form of execution was so cruel that Roman soldiers often even denied burial to the victim, allowing his body to hang on the cross until it literally disintegrated. Pain, torture of insects and animals, view of brutal spectators, horror of rigid fixation, combined to make it a supreme humiliation and torture. He was already a bleeding mass who was left to die to exposure.

Archaeologists discovered the remains of a young man who had been crucified with his forearms nailed to the cross and his legs bent at the knees and broken. His legs were pulled over one another in such a way that an iron nail was driven through both heels together.

According to Jewish law anyone who was crucified was considered cursed of God (Deut. 21:23; Gal. 3:13).

It was illegal to inflict it on any Roman citizen. All ancient writers regarded crucifixion as the most shameful of deaths and appropriate only for slaves and criminals. It was an extremely painful and slow way of dying.

Emotional suffering of Jesus

There was also the intense emotional suffering of Jesus. Nothing could have prepared Him for the emotional evils heaped upon Him that day.

Roman soldiers gathered around Jesus in the Praetorium and they stripped Him, and put a scarlet robe on Him (vv. 27-28). This robe was a short military cloak which kings and emperors as well as soldiers wore. Then they wove a crown of thorns and pressed it on His head, and a reed in His right hand; and they knelt down before Him and mocked Him, saying Hail, King of the Jews! (v. 29). The soldiers made mockery of the King of kings in their trappings of royalty.

The last of King David's dynasty was wrapped in a symbol of our sins so we could be clothed in His perfect righteousness. He was crowned with a crown of thorns the one who alone is worthy of many crowns. They had waited a thousand years for the arrival of the King of the Jews and when He came they crucified Him. What an insult to the King of Glory. To add insult to injury they put a banner over His head, THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS (v. 37).

They showed their contempt and hatred by spitting upon His naked body and took the reed and began to continually beat Him on the head (v. 30). They insulted the king of kings by putting a stick in his hands as a royal scepter. After they had mocked Him, they took His robe off and put His garments on Him, and led Him away to crucify Him (v. 31).

The crucified were hung naked on the cross. When the Roman soldiers lifted Him up on the cross they took His garments and divided them up among themselves and sat down to keep watch over at His naked bleeding body as if to prevent His friends from rescuing Him from the cross (vv. 35-36).

They considered Jesus the worst of the criminals so they crucified Him with two robbers, one on the right and one on the left. Isaiah had poetically written centuries earlier the awesome truth of this day:

Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great,
And He will divide the booty with the strong;
Because He poured out Himself to death,
And was numbered with the transgressors;
Yet He Himself bore the sin of many,
And interceded for the transgressors (53:12).

The humiliation of the crucifixion would be bad enough, but the passersby came up hurling abuse at Him, wagging their heads, and saying You who destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross (v. 39-40). Spectators coming and going from the city made good of their insults and kept up their blasphemy of Jesus. The moving by nodding the head toward the cross was a contemptuous gesture of scorn and insult. They sneeringly suggested that this was the end of the Messiah. To show their derision they tossed their heads at Him as an insult.

If you are the Son of God, reminds us of the temptations of Jesus in the wilderness at the beginning of His ministry (Matt. 4:3, 6). If you really are God's Son, then free yourself and come down from the cross! "

Phillips translates, If this is the king of Israel, why doesn't He come down from the cross now, and we will believe Him! If He is the Messiah who can perform miracles then now is the time for Him to perform the supreme miracle and then we will believe He is the Messiah.

The chief priests, scribes and elders keep stirring up the crowds saying, He saved others; He cannot save Himself. He is the King of Israel; let Him come down from the cross, and we shall believe in Him. He trusts in God; let Him deliver Him now, if He takes pleasure in Him; for He said, I am the Son of God (v. 42). It is surprising that religious people of their prominence should be present at a crucifixion, much less on the Day

is surprising that religious people of their prominence should be present at a crucifixion, much less on the Day of Preparation for the Passover.

He stayed on the cross because He was the Son of God.

This abusive rabble went on for three hours and then God pulled the curtain on the show. Suddenly supernatural darkness fell upon the land until the ninth hour (3 p.m.) (v. 45). It was divine intervention. Darkness is associated with judgment in the Old Testament prophets (Isa. 5:30; 13:10-11; Joel 3:14-15). A hush of silence fell over the land as the divine sufferer hung there in humiliation and shame as God judged sin.

Spiritual suffering of Jesus

The physical and emotional suffering doesn't tell us all the story. There was an intense spiritual suffering on the cross. It was about three in the afternoon when Jesus cried out with a loud voice saying, ELI, ELI, LAMA SABACHTHANI? that is, MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAST THOU FORSAKEN ME? (v. 46; cf. Ps. 22:1).

The word forsaken here means to leave, to down, in. Hence it means to forsake someone in a state of defeat, or helplessness, or in the midst of hostile circumstances. It has the idea of leaving someone, abandoning, deserting, leaving in straits, to leave helpless or to let one down. It is the anguish of god-forsakenness.

Now the most intense form of suffering takes place on the cross. The sinless, righteous Son of God is dying as a spiritual sacrifice for our sins. It was so intense that Martin Luther declared, God forsaken of God, who can understand that! It was the cry of God!

Why had God the Father forsaken God the Son? This is part of the terrible price of putting away sin!

During His whole life up to this point Jesus enjoyed a unique one of a kind fellowship with His heavenly Father and now in His death there is a total abandonment by His Father.

Jesus Christ was made sin. God is a holy and righteous God who cannot bear to look upon sin. The wages of sin is death. On Jesus representatively fell the collective consequence of your sin and mine. God made Him our representative for sin and He died in our place.

For the first time in eternity the intimate sweet holy fellowship between the Father and the Son was broken. Never before, even for a moment, was the perfect relationship between the Father and the Son ever broken. And now at a point in time this oneness that existed down through eternity was broken, not because of something He had done, but because of sin, your sins and mine. The unbroken communion between the Father and the Son was mysteriously broken. Jesus gave expression to that terrible sense of abandonment.

In that moment the weight of the sins of all humanity from eternity to eternity fell on Jesus. The combined sins of the entire world, of all the accumulated sins of everyone who had ever lived, and everyone who would ever live, were laid on the One individual who never experienced sin.

Why? Why? Why?

He [God] made Him [Jesus Christ] who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him (2 Corinthians 5:21).

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Isaiah in his powerful poem of the Suffering Servant eloquently writes:

Surely our griefs He Himself bore,
And our sorrows He carried;
Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken,
Smitten of God, and afflicted.
But He was pierced through for our transgressions,
He was crushed for our iniquities;
The chastening for our well-being *fell* upon Him,
And by His scourging we are healed.
All of us 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 (Isaiah 53:4-6).

In verse ten the prophet goes on to tell us that Christ was the offering for our sin.

But the Lord was pleased
To crush Him, putting *Him* to grief;
If He would render Himself *as* a guilt offering,
He will see *His* offspring,
He will prolong *His* days,
And the good pleasure of the Lord will prosper in His hand. ”

This divine *guilt offering* or *trespass offering* was the sacrifice paid by the soul of the Suffering Servant of Yahweh by submitting to the violent death on the cross. His death to all who will come to Him and put their trust in Him discharges the guilt or debt and sets them free. This Suffering Servant of Yahweh is the end of all the Jewish sacrifices. He is the satisfaction of the justice of God. He is the climax of all the sacrifices in the Old Testament. This is why He had to die.

Matthew tells us that after Jesus had cried those awesome words from the cross He *cried* out with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit (v. 50). He died. It was customary for the Romans to leave a crucified body on the cross until it rotted. Pilate conceded to the religious customs of the Jews and allowed the bodies to be taken down. Post mortem set in and they took Him down from the cross and buried Him in a tomb not far away.

Augustine correctly said, *He gave up His life because He willed it, when He willed it, and as He willed it.* ” Even in His death he was sovereign and He had control over it.

A group of Roman soldiers were assigned by Pilate to stand guard at the tomb. They closely guarded the grave to prevent anyone from stealing the body. The Jewish leaders wanted impartial guards, Romans, not temple guards posted at the tomb. A group of Roman soldiers were stationed there and made the tomb secure by putting a rope over the stone and then a seal of wax with an insignia of the Jewish authorities was attached to it. They put their mark on it so as to know if the stone was moved. They left the soldiers there to guard the tomb.

Matthew is not telling us that the divine Spirit departed from Jesus before He died. He is no Gnostic. To *give up the spirit* is a Hebrew idiom that simply means Jesus died. We use the expression in English, *to*

give up the spirit is a Hebrew idiom that simply means Jesus died. We use the expression in English, to breathe one's last. ”

THE CONCLUSION

There were all kinds of reactions that day to what transpired on the cross. People reacted in various ways such as they do today.

The response of the people

For some it was a time of amusement. They passed by to entertain themselves. And some of those who were standing there, when they heard it, began saying, This man is calling for Elijah. And immediately one of them ran, and taking a sponge, he filled it with sour wine, and put it on a reed, and gave Him a drink. But the rest of them said, Let us see whether Elijah will come to save Him (vv. 47-49).

Come to the show. Let's see the gladiators tonight. Let's see if this is really Son of God.

An experienced executioner was terribly frightened at the events that day. Now the centurion, and those who were with him keeping guard over Jesus, when they saw the earthquake and the things that were happening, became very frightened and said, Truly this was the Son of God! (v. 54).

The Roman soldiers, seeing and experiencing all the events of the trials and execution of this righteous man declared what the unbelieving Jews refused to admit, Jesus really is the Son of God.

Still there were others that day who reached out and ministered to Jesus. Many women were there looking on from a distance, who had followed Jesus from Galilee while ministering to Him. Among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee. When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who himself had also become a disciple of Jesus (vv. 55-57). Joseph took the body down from the cross, after Pilate had Jesus certified dead, and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock; and he rolled a large stone against the entrance of the tomb and went away (v. 60). M. R. Vincent says, The idea is that they sealed the stone in the presence of the guard, and then left them to keep watch. It would be important that the guard would witness the sealing. The sealing was performed by stretching a cord across the stone and fastening it to the rock at either end by means of sealing clay.

When God raised Jesus from the dead He demonstrated His sovereignty over the powers of the Jews and the Romans. The Lord God reigns!

After Jesus had risen from the dead three days later many worshipped Him. Those who came to continue with His burial were told, I know you are looking for Jesus who has been crucified. He is not here, for He has risen, just as he said, Come, see the place where He was lying. . . And they came up and took hold of His feet and worshipped Him (28:5-6, 9).

The resurrection is the undeniable demonstration and evidence of the fact that the suffering servant has accomplished His work. He had provided salvation by going to the cross and dying for us. God now reaches down to us depraved sinners and offers us salvation by grace alone, through faith alone in Christ alone.

The curtain separating the holy place from the most holy of holies was torn from top to bottom (Ex. 26:31-35; 40:21). God tore it in two! He opened a way into His presence for all who will believe on Jesus as their only means of salvation.

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The resurrection of Jesus brought about the resurrection of His people (vv. 52-53). The rending of the temple veil makes it clear that the only way to God is open to all who come. Moreover, the raising of the dead saints declares that death has been conquered. Here is a promise of the great final resurrection of those who die in Christ. ”

Our response today

What is your response to the death of the Son of God?

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life (John 3:16). No one can ever say God does not love him or her. He has demonstrated that love once and for all in sending His sinless son to die on the cross for your sins. God loves you and has demonstrated that love.

Jesus did not come and die for good people. He came and died for sinners. He died for those of us who have come short of God's expectations of us. He died for those of us who have offended Him. The truth is we are so condemned that there is nothing that you or I can ever do to merit or gain salvation. All of our goodness is as dirty, soiled, filthy rags. They soil anything they touch. Anything we touch brings condemnation. Our sins are so deep, so bad they need surgical treatment for a permanent cure. Isaiah wrote in 1:6,

From the sole of the foot even to the head
There is nothing sound in it,
Only bruises, welts and raw wounds,
Not pressed out or bandaged,
Nor softened with oil. ”

This is why Jesus went to the cross. You and I needed radical spiritual surgery to solve our problems. That is how sinful we are in God's eyes. Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness (Heb. 9:22).

For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. . . But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:6, 8).

Because Jesus went to the cross and died for you God now offers you salvation. It is His free gift to you. It is already paid in full. There are no strings attached, no manipulations, no gimmicks, etc. All you have to do is humble yourself and receive it. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved. The apostle Paul wrote, that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation (10:9-10).

What will you do with Jesus today?

If you need help in becoming a Christian here is [A Free Gift for You](#).

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