

The Gospel of Matthew
Week 32
Matthew 27:32-61

Day One

32 As they were going out, they met a man from Cyrene, named Simon, and they forced him to carry the cross. 33 They came to a place called Golgotha (which means The Place of the Skull). 34 There they offered Jesus wine to drink, mixed with gall; but after tasting it, he refused to drink it. 35 When they had crucified him, they divided up his clothes by casting lots. 36 And sitting down, they kept watch over him there.

v. 32 – Jesus was suffering from lack of sleep, loss of blood and torture. He was made to carry His own cross, but must have faltered along the way, which is understandable. The soldiers found a man named Simon along the way and forced him to help Jesus carry His cross. This was the time of the feast of Passover and Unleavened Bread so visitors from all around the world would have been in Jerusalem, and one of them was forced into service. In Mark 15:21, we are told that this Simon was the father of Rufus and Alexander, who must have been believers known amongst the church.

v. 33 – Matthew wrote the shortest account of Jesus’ last hours, perhaps since the Jews would have been familiar either with the details of Jesus’ death or of the crucifixion procedure. For Matthew, the details weren’t that important. What was important was that the Lamb of God was slain for the sins of the world and that his Jewish audience be confronted with and convinced of that truth. In part, this is why the gospels have varying accounts of the same stories. Each writer penned his account with purpose, having a common theme aimed at a specific audience.

When you go to Israel, you visit the only evangelical site in Jerusalem known as the Garden Tomb. It is a peaceful place in the heart of the busy city, run by volunteers, facing what looks like a human skull in the side of a hill! The only problem is that Jerusalem has changed so much in 2,000 years and has had so many earthquakes that I doubt if that is the exact place. There is a first or second century tom hewn out of the hillside rock and it is one of the most moving places you will visit in the Holy Land. Communion there is always a special event.

Have you thought about going to the Holy Land at some point? If so, I urge you to do it! It will change the way you read the Bible and think of Jesus. There are always surprises when you go there; things you didn’t think would move you that do and things you were sure would move you that don’t. I have been there 10 times and it never gets old.

v. 34 – This drink would have relieved some of Jesus’ pain, but he refused to take it. I often told inmates when I did prison work that Jesus was tempted to take “drugs” at this point to deaden His pain and suffering but refused. If He refused drugs to deaden His pain and rejection, He can help others who are tempted to take them.

vs. 35&36 – Jesus did not have much, but what He had the guards gambled to take as their own. Then they sat down to watch Jesus die. Matthew’s account is short and to the point, but one cannot read this without being moved at the cruelty expressed toward this innocent man, the Son of God.

Day Two

37 Above his head they placed the written charge against him: THIS IS JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS. 38 Two robbers were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left. 39 Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads 40 and saying, "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. 37 – They wrote and posted the truth when they put the sign over Jesus’ head on the cross, stating that He was King of the Jews. They did it mockingly, however, but still broadcast the truth for all to see. They had crucified their King and they were oblivious to the implications or meaning.

v. 38 – Matthew mentioned the two robbers who were on either side of Jesus, but does not relate the story of how one of them called on the name of the Lord and was saved. **Why not?** We cannot fully know what Matthew was thinking, but the story probably did not fit with his overall purpose, so he left it out. The issue isn’t that Matthew didn’t include it; the issue is that the Spirit did include it in Luke’s gospel at Luke 23:39-43.

You can read various newspaper accounts of the same story and get totally different version, all of which are true and accurate, but none of which are complete. Each writer had his or her own perspective and emphasis, and it would change the perspective of the story without changing or including all the facts. Even which facts were included in those accounts, however, would vary greatly according to the author, newspaper and writer’s philosophy

Matthew was focusing on Jesus’ humiliation in this account, pointing out the sign with His title and His companions as He hung on the cross. Barabbas should have been there, but he was released, so innocent Jesus was left to hang with two thieves. This makes me think of what Paul wrote:

Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death — even death on a cross! (Philippians 2:6-8).

Are you willing to be obedient to the point of death as Jesus was? How can you pick up your cross and follow after Him?

vs. 39&40 – The crucifixion did not happen in a private place. There were passersby who looked at what was happening and made comments about Jesus and what He had said. They were expressing their disgust according to their interpretation of what Jesus had said, misunderstanding that they were watching the very fulfillment! He had said He would restore the “temple” after three days, and He would keep His word – since the temple to Him was His body. The Temple to the passersby was the worship building that had taken decades to build.

The spectators demanded that Jesus come down from the cross and save Himself, to prove that He was who He said He was. Jesus would indeed come down from the cross – as a dead man – only to be raised from the dead three days later. He did what they were asking in a sense, but did it in a way that pleased the Father and not the crowds.

Day Three

41 In the same way the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders mocked him. 42 "He saved others," they said, "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. 43 He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, 'I am the Son of God.' " 44 In the same way the robbers who were crucified with him also heaped insults on him.

v. 41 – I am going through some trials right now (who isn't) but I take great comfort and consolation from these verses. I am not consoled that Jesus was mocked and scorned. I am challenged, however, by how well He responded. Everything that could go “wrong” was going wrong, yet Jesus maintained His trust in God. He did not retaliate or strike back. He endured unwarranted shame and kept His focus on the Father and His will. He responded so nobly and so impeccably that I look at my own situation and take great comfort, asking for God's help to stay faithful in this season.

God's testing and trials are not whimsical or capricious. They are to develop something in us that only suffering can develop. **Are you suffering right now? If so, can you call on Jesus to help you respond as He did in these verses?**

v. 42 – The leaders demanded that Jesus come down from the cross before they would consent to believe in Him and His mission. It is interesting that the Jews must have expected their Messiah to have some sort of supernatural power, for their expectation was that He would be able to save Himself from Roman crucifixion. If King David had been crucified like Jesus, he would not have been able to do what the leaders were asking. The Jews had higher expectations, however, for their Messianic King. And Jesus had raised those expectations by His own actions.

It is of note that Jesus did come down from the cross in a matter of speaking, for although He died, He also rose from the dead. Yet when He did, the leaders still did not believe. They had no intention of believing, for the leaders were not interested in who and what Jesus was or could do. They had rejected Him as their King.

v. 43 – The leaders then quoted Jesus saying that He was the Son of God. The leaders then also challenged God the Father to save Jesus. The elders wanted the kind of proof that Jesus was not willing to provide. They tried to use Jesus’ own words to force Him into a display of power to prove His claims. These taunts were similar to the challenges that Satan issued in Matthew 4. Satan wanted a public display of power and tried to tempt Jesus into providing a show. Jesus refused then and He refused to do so on the cross.

Do you want God to put on a show of sorts before you will believe? Don’t answer too quickly, for when you want God to provide clear and exact directions with confirmations before you will do something that is on your heart and mind, you are in a way requiring God to put on a show before you act. Jesus did put on a “show” and that was being raised from the dead. You may have all the signs you are going to get, so it’s time to stop waiting for a confirmation and start the business, go on the missions trip, leave your job, go into ministry, or whatever else God is requiring of you to do.

v. 44 – Those who were crucified with Jesus were also yelling at Him to save Himself and them along with Him. We know from Luke’s gospel that the one thief was so moved by Jesus’ spirit on the cross that He turned from an abuser to a convert in his last moments on earth. We also know that Jesus freely extended grace to the thief when he asked for it.

Day Four

45 From the sixth hour until the ninth hour darkness came over all the land. 46 About the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?"—which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" 47 When some of those standing there heard this, they said, "He's calling Elijah." 48 Immediately one of them ran and got a sponge. He filled it with wine vinegar, put it on a stick, and offered it to Jesus to drink.

v. 45 – **Isn’t it interesting that nature felt and reflected the ordeal that Jesus was going through?** The skies turned dark because their Creator, the Son of God, was dying on the cross. Creation was affected by the fall of Adam and now creation was affected by the death of its Savior. We read in Romans that creation actually groans as it awaits freedom from the curse brought about by Adam’s sin:

The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God (Romans 8:19-21).

v. 46 – Jesus then said something on the cross that Matthew felt the need to translate for his readers. This means that what Jesus said was not Hebrew or Aramaic. **What language could it have been? How did Matthew know what the interpretation of what Jesus had said?** Some have conjectured that it was Jesus’ heavenly language or what is also known as tongues. Jesus then interpreted it when He came back from the

dead and the disciples asked Him. I am not sure that is the case, but it is interesting to think about what language Jesus used in that instance.

Jesus was quoting the first line of Psalm 22, which is a psalm that starts off as a complaint but ends in a victory chant. You may want to read Psalm 22 for yourself, but here are a few of the last lines.

I will declare your name to my brothers; in the congregation I will praise you. You who fear the Lord, praise him! All you descendants of Jacob, honor him! Revere him, all you descendants of Israel! For he has not despised or disdained the suffering of the afflicted one; he has not hidden his face from him but has listened to his cry for help (Psalm 22:22-24).

It is permissible to be honest with God and tell Him how you feel, even if you feel like He has abandoned you. I have found that if you are honest with God, however, you won't end with that perspective, for God will meet you and shift your spirit from despair to hope. You must, however, be totally and brutally honest. You cannot pretend not to feel or think what in reality you are. **Are you being honest with God? Can you be honest until you reach a breakthrough from your limited perspective to God's?**

v. 47 – The people close by thought Jesus was calling Elijah, mistaking “eloi” for Elijah. **Why would Jesus call upon Elijah when He could call upon God Himself?** At any rate, the Jews were full of superstitions and misconceptions of their own Scriptures, which caused them to repeatedly misunderstand Jesus, His words and His mission.

v. 48 – I am not sure what purpose sipping vinegar would have served at that point in Jesus' last moments and why that was the chosen response to His words. Perhaps the person who gave it to Jesus wanted to prolong His consciousness and reduce His pain so they could see Elijah make an appearance. Elijah had already appeared to Jesus at the transfiguration, and was not about to come again. As stated earlier, Jesus had to endure this trial alone.

Do you believe any biblical fables and accept them as true, like these Jews did?

Don't answer too quickly, for the interpretation of the end times is full of fables and myths that many present as “gospel truth.”

Day Five

49 The rest said, "Now leave him alone. Let's see if Elijah comes to save him." 50 And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit. 51 At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook and the rocks split. 52 The tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. 53 They came out of the tombs, and after Jesus' resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many people.

v. 49 – The people were spiritually dull and were more interested in seeing a spectacular miracle than alleviating Jesus’ pain. The people waited to see if Elijah would show up to save Jesus but Elijah disappointed them and not come.

v. 50 – Jesus did not cooperate with the wishes of the people present, for at that very moment, He died, after crying out with a loud voice. Notice the wording when Jesus said that He gave up His spirit; it was not taken from Him. What He did, He did willingly as He stated in John’s gospel:

“The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life — only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father” (John 10:17-18).

v. 51 – The curtain in the Temple that separated the Holy of Holies from the inner court was torn in two, from top to bottom. It symbolized that the way to God in the Holy of Holies was now open to all men (not just the high priest) and it was heaven’s initiative, since the curtain was torn first at the top. We read about what happened in the spiritual realm in Hebrews:

When Christ came as high priest of the good things that are already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not man-made, that is to say, not a part of this creation. He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption. The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God! (Hebrews 9:11-14).

Jesus has entered the Holy of Holies for you and me, to perform the work that only the High Priest could perform. That work was shedding blood for the remission of sins. **How bold are you to confess your sins and seek God’s mercy based on what Jesus did? How can you be even more confident and bold as you come to God as you learn to live in the sacrifice that Jesus made?**

v. 52 – In keeping with the darkened sky, the earth itself shook when Jesus died. What’s more, many of the departed saints came out of their tombs and were seen walking in the holy city. This is so significant to me, since Jesus Himself was dead, yet dead people were seen alive. That means that Jesus had simply changed venues; He was alive, but could not be seen on earth. Yet where He went had an impact on the souls who were departed. It was not Jesus’ resurrection that brought these people back to life; it was His death! In His death, we have life!

v. 53 – After Jesus’ resurrection, those raised saints went into the city and appeared to many. Now I am not clear whether the raised were seen before or only after the

resurrection. At any rate, it isn't important. **Did you notice that these were Old Testament saints and holy people who were raised from the dead?** That means that salvation was accessible prior to Jesus' appearance, but that their salvation could only be in Jesus. So there were some Old Testament saints who found out how to access the promise of the Messiah before He ever came. They put their faith in God to save them through His promise made to Adam and now Jesus had gone to set them free.

And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel" (Genesis 3:15).

"Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

There is salvation and victory over Satan through the promised One of God, through the Son of God, Jesus.

Day Six

54 When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, "Surely he was the Son[of God!" 55 Many women were there, watching from a distance. They had followed Jesus from Galilee to care for his needs. 56 Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of Zebedee's sons.

v. 54 – The Roman guards were impressed by the events that surrounded Jesus' death and Jesus' demeanor, so much so that they declared Him to be God's Son! The Jews were hardened in their unbelief, but these guards represented some of the first fruits of Jesus' ministry among the Gentiles. These hardened soldiers saw what happened and bore witness to the truth, the same truth that the Jews had mocked and rejected: Jesus was the Son of God! One never knows how anyone else will respond to the gospel, so don't prejudge. Just share the facts and let the Holy Spirit do the work. After how the soldiers treated Jesus, I would never have imagined that any would have responded as they did.

v. 55 – Not many of Jesus' male disciples were present, but many of the women disciples were. Jesus had a great impact on women and they were loyal to Him until the end, standing by and watching His suffering. **Are you loyal to Jesus no matter how it affects you? Do you stand by Him even when others mock Him?** I hope so.

These women had come from Galilee, to help take care of Jesus' needs while He traveled and ministered. The women were away from home while in Jerusalem, but undoubtedly had friends and family there. Yet Galilee is a two-hour drive away from Jerusalem today, so it was a long journey for them back then. **What price are you paying to follow Jesus and take care of His people?**

v. 56 – Three women are mentioned by name. **I wonder why Matthew did this? Were these woman well-known among his readers so that by mentioning them he would**

increase the account's credibility? I am not sure, but I know that I am impressed with the commitment and loyalty of the women in the face of danger to anyone aligning themselves with Jesus in that hour. The men had fled for the most part, but the women stayed close until the end.

William Booth, the founder of the Salvation Army, once said, "Some of my best men are women!" He often sent women to troubled inner city areas where they had greater ministry success than men. I have often said that the church in many instances is trying to achieve its mission with one arm tied behind its back and with only half its gift base due to the lack of women in ministry.

What is your viewpoint on women in ministry? What is the basis for your view? What roles can women play in the church and in building the Kingdom? How can we more effectively involve women in the work of the ministry?

Day Seven

57 As evening approached, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who had himself become a disciple of Jesus. 58 Going to Pilate, he asked for Jesus' body, and Pilate ordered that it be given to him. 59 Joseph took the body, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, 60 and placed it in his own new tomb that he had cut out of the rock. He rolled a big stone in front of the entrance to the tomb and went away. 61 Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were sitting there opposite the tomb.

vs. 57&58 – It was getting dark and the Sabbath was approaching when no work could be done. Now that Jesus was dead, people began to emerge who stood strong in the midst of the crisis. We already saw the women close by who watched Jesus die. Now we see Joseph of Arimathea, one of the ruling council members, coming forward to ask for Jesus' dead body. This took great courage to identify with Jesus at this point in time, but Joseph did it with boldness. He went to Pilate and asked permission to bury Jesus.

Matthew clearly identified Joseph as a disciple. While Joseph could not prevent the events that had just taken place, he decided to honor his Master by seeing that He had a proper burial. Yet even Joseph must have heard Jesus talk about His resurrection, but Joseph did not seem to count that much of a possibility. Pilate ordered that Jesus' body be given to Joseph as he requested.

vs. 59&60 – I mentioned earlier that I have been to the Garden Tomb in Jerusalem and seen a tomb like Joseph's carved out of the hillside rock. Joseph had to have some money to have this done, for it would require laborers chiseling away for many days to make a tomb big enough to meet the needs of Joseph and his family. Perhaps Joseph believed that this would be a temporary resting place for Jesus' body, since He would soon be raised from the dead. Or perhaps Joseph was willing to contribute his own tomb to Jesus. Either way, he laid Jesus in that tomb, after he wrapped his body in a clean linen cloth

The Sabbath was imminent, so Joseph could not do any more than he did. He rolled a large stone in front of the tomb to keep the body safe from marauders and went off, intending to return after the Sabbath to take better care of the body.

Without knowing it, Joseph was simply creating the conditions whereby God could show Himself strong when He raised Jesus from the dead. This tomb seemed secure from man's point of view and death seemed to be the final world. God overcame them all when He exerted His power in raising Jesus. The stone was easily moved and a dead body brought back to life walked out. God had no problems getting in or out of that tomb after man had sealed and set guards over it.

Joseph went home to celebrate the Sabbath with his family, perhaps distraught over the events of the day. Little did he know that his faith would be revolutionized in just a few days when Jesus would give him his tomb back!

v. 60 – The two Marys followed Joseph to see where he had put the body. They were still “hanging around” to ascertain where Jesus was buried. They too did not grasp the reality of what Jesus had predicted, for they watched so they could return and anoint His body for burial. They had faith but their faith would go to a new level when they would return to see the tomb empty. But for now, everything was where it was supposed to be for the rest of the story to unfold.