

Text: Matthew 27:26-44

Title: Messiah Scourged, Mocked and Crucified

Truth: The suffering of our Savior was tremendous.

Date/Location: December 28, 2022 at FBC

Introduction

We continue studying the suffering of Jesus after the trial in front of Pilate and substitution of Barabbas. Things progress downhill rapidly.

I. Scourged, v. 26

- A. After release Barabbas to the bloodthirsty crowd (v. 25), he had to give orders to the soldiers to scourge and crucify Jesus. This is why I was saying last time that his hand-washing act in front of the crowd was so absurd. He was the one ordering a man to be harmed, a man he himself said was innocent. He could find no guilt in him, but he ordered this heinous crime to be done to him.
- B. About scourging, let me share with you the note in the MacArthur Study Bible: “The whip used for scourging consisted of several strands of leather attached to a wooden handle. Each strand had a bit of metal or bone attached to the end. The victim was bound to a post by the wrists, high over his head, so that the flesh of the back would be taut. An expert at wielding the scourge could literally tear the flesh from the back, lacerating muscles, and sometimes even exposing the kidneys or other internal organs. Scourging alone was fatal in some cases.” Need I say more?
- C. After the scourging, Pilate ordered Jesus to be crucified, just like the crowd desired. To be crucified means to be affixed to a wooden cross. Some are adamant that the “cross” was actually a stake. The word “stauros” is used to refer to different things such as fence stakes, or a T-shaped cross, one in which the vertical extends above the horizontal like we are accustomed to seeing. But the Romans also crucified people on poles, stakes, upside-down crosses, X-shaped crosses, walls, roofs, etc. Evidence for a traditional cross includes John 21:18 where Peter would “stretch out his hands” and John 20:25 where reference is made to plural

“nails” in the hands of the Lord. A stake would only require a singular nail. The verb form “to crucify” covers all of these cases, as the torturous and fatal result was the same in the end.

II. Mocked, v. 27-31

- A. Approximately 600 soldiers made up the garrison. Probably only some were on duty during this shift, but that still might number into the 100s of soldiers who gathered around to see this spectacle. As young men in a pack sometimes are, they were cruel and vicious.
- B. They put on Jesus a scarlet robe (or blue or purple, Mark 15:17, John 19:2). There is naturally some subjective variation allowed in the description of colors. The soldiers may have created a “king costume” using whatever makeshift stuff they had around.
- C. They added a crown, but could not find one suitable, so they made one of a thorny vine and put it on his head. This would add to the pain and suffering of the whole situation.
- D. They found a plant—a reed—that would suffice in their pretend game of “worship the king.”
- E. The false worship was intended to highlight the fact that the so-called king was under their power, impotent (so they thought), and thus symbolic of the Romans’ true power over the Jewish nation. No respect was offered to a man who was about to die. The punishment continued to be cruel and unusual.
- F. At this point, the physical condition of Jesus must have been nearly unbearable. He was in severe pain from the lashes, blood loss, sleepless night, stress, etc. Yet He still did not sin.
- G. The mocking became physical when they struck him about the head and spit upon him. This demonstrated their utter contempt for the man, in part for who He was, but also in part for who He represented—the Jewish people. Ultimately it is a case that they laid hands upon the anointed of God, and probably most of them did not repent, thus guaranteeing they would be heavily punished by God the Father.

H. At the end of this, they put his clothes back onto Him and took Him away to crucify. No last meal, no last words, nothing of respect for the image of God in this man.

III. Crucified, v. 32-38

A. A substitute cross-carrier, Simon of Cyrene. He was from a city in North Africa which is in modern-day Libya. Its name today is Shahhat. It was known for grain, wool, horse breeding, and an herb called silphium that was rare but valuable for its supposed medicinal qualities for sore throats, hernias, contraception, and it had supposedly aphrodisiac qualities. The Roman soldiers compelled him to carry the cross of Jesus. Probably the “cross” was the horizontal bar, with the upright at the crucifixion site, but it could have been the entire cross.

B. The cruelty of the cross is almost unimaginable. It was a slow, torturous form of death “perfected” by the Romans after they received it from other ancient cultures like the Persians. Death came by a combination of means including exhaustion, pain, blood loss, asphyxiation, or even being eaten alive by birds of prey. Or, having the legs broken, which led to quick asphyxiation.

I tend to think that extended pondering of the physical brutality of the cross is not profitable because of the violence of it and the state of mind that it induces in the thinker. We must also remember also that a great deal of the suffering of it was *spiritual*—that God was punishing the Son for the sins of the world alongside and in the physical suffering.

C. Golgotha was the place. It may have been so named for its shape, or for the accumulation of victims’ skulls on the site.

D. The sour wine mingled with gall (bitter—myrrh, Mark 15:23) was a narcotic pain deadener. The Lord refused to become stupefied in accomplishing His work. This does not teach for or against using pain killers today. In this case, it was inappropriate because the Lord still had ministry to do and words to say. In many other contexts, it is fine to reduce human suffering.

E. The soldiers just got their work done—putting the victims on the crosses—and then turn to their own profit by taking the garments

of the condemned men. Who would want blood-stained garments after the brutal scourging? I guess the soldiers wanted them.

- F. The second half of verse 35 records Matthew's evaluation of what happened. He explains that this event was a "fulfillment" of Scripture. The nature of fulfillment is debated:
1. Is it a fulfillment by analogy, like Matthew sometimes uses (2:15, referring to Hosea 11:1)? That is to say, David was expressing his own genuine feeling that God had abandoned him, and that his enemies were overpowering him, and that he was on the doorstep of death. Matthew used this to show that Jesus fulfilled the same *pattern* as David, as a righteous sufferer. After studying hermeneutics over a number of years, I have favored this viewpoint. In this case, David is expressing in the Psalm very emotive, powerful language to describe his predicament. That language is so close to the same suffering of Messiah that it can be used to describe the same, even though David did not intend his audience to see that as they read the Psalm.
 2. Is it a fulfillment of an explicit future prediction, that is, that in Psalm 22:18 David *intended* for his audience to understand that his words to indicate a future event? If this is the case, something like Acts 2:30 would have to be true. There, Luke records Peter as making this argument: David, since he was a prophet, and knowing the prior revelation that God made that the Messiah would arise from his seed, foresaw the future and spoke concerning things to come. In that passage, it was the coming resurrection of Messiah. It could not refer to David's resurrection because he had definitely died and his body had seen corruption. This could be similar to the situation in Psalm 22:18, but it is entirely possible that David's enemies did haggle over his garments at some point, in which case it was not impossible for the Psalm to refer to David himself like it is in Psalm 16:10.

Regardless of which view you take about the nature of the fulfillment, let it sink in that the soldiers were taking the last shred of property that the condemned person owned and absconding with it for

themselves. The person who dies has no need of it because they will take nothing out of this world (1 Timothy 6:6-10).

- G. The soldiers kept watch, probably more to keep the crowds away than anything, because the crucified men were not going anywhere. They also nailed up an inscription with his crime: that He was named Jesus and His title was “King of the Jews.” In other words, there was no crime.
- H. Matthew records in verse 38 that there were two thieves crucified with Jesus. This is such common knowledge that we do not even think about it, but if you consider if these were truly robbers—thieves, stealers—why were they being *killed* for a property crime? The word for “thief” can refer to a bandit or a highwayman. But it can also refer to a revolutionary or insurrectionist, a guerrilla, like Barabbas, the one who was swapped out for Jesus. In fact, John 18:40 says that Barabbas was a “robber,” and uses the same Greek word describing the two thieves with Jesus. And Mark 15:7 says that they committed murder in their rebellion, so it is entirely possible that these “thieves” were actually murderous rebels (outlaws), which makes their punishment more fitting to the nature of the crime than if it were merely theft of property, which can be restored by restitution. On that, see Lev. 6:4-6.

IV. Mocked Again, v. 39-44

- A. Now that Jesus is on the cross and exposed to the world, He becomes the object of ridicule even more than normal criminals there. How many times residents around Jerusalem had seen men hanging on the cross? How many mothers had shielded the eyes of their young children from this horrid sight? How many teenagers had sat leering at the spectacle of men dying on crosses? It became commonplace so there was a general feeling of reproach on the criminals. But Jesus was especially famous, and became the subject of blasphemous ridicule as they trampled the King and Creator of the Universe under foot.
- B. Passers-by were involved. They had heard of the famous saying of Jesus that He would rebuild the temple in three days. They did not believe He could truly do that, but *if* He could, then He could save

Himself. They mockingly reasoned that if He could fix the temple in three days, and He was in fact the Messiah, he should be able to save Himself and come down from the cross. But in their mocking, they reveal their ignorance—they did not understand what Jesus obviously meant by the statement (about His resurrection, John 2:21). His words had been turned into a soundbite and then propaganda against Him, but they were fulfilling His prophecy even as they mocked Him for it.

They misunderstood entirely what He was doing there. “If I be lifted up... (John 12:32). He said that to signify by what death he would die (John 12:33).

Then they added, “If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross.” God answers: “If He is the Son of God, He will rise again from the dead on the third day.”

- C. The chief priests were also involved in the mocking, along with the scribes and elders. There is something especially distasteful about this—that older men, religious men, educated men, would lower themselves to such depths as to mock a man who is suffering terrible calamity. Even if they strenuously disagreed with them, they should have a holy sense of dread that an image of God is being snuffed out on the cross, if not even more than that.

They somehow recognized that Jesus “saved” others. They probably were referring to the resurrection of Lazarus or similar events that had permeated the culture there. But, they said, He could not save Himself. He had a fundamental inability, they thought, to fix His situation. But they were wrong on that point as well. John 10:18 says that no one takes Jesus’s life from Him. He lays it down on His own authority.

Then they added, “If He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down.” They pledged that then they would believe Him. But this pledge is suspect, for their hearts were hardened against Him. What He ended up doing was even more stupendous—rising from the dead—but they still did not believe Him, as Abraham said in Luke 16:31.

D. Even the robbers on the right and left got into the mocking game as well. They “reviled” Him—demeaning Him and heaping insults upon Him (KJV paraphrases this as, “cast the same in his teeth”). Later one of the thieves realized the error of his ways (Luke 23:40-42). I take note of how the Lord treated this repentant thief—with care and kindness, not with rebuke. That is how God treats us when we come to Him with faith-filled repentance. You must not think that you are too far past gone for God to receive you to Himself!

Conclusion

The gospel portrays for us a severely suffering Messiah. His physical suffering was matched by the emotional torment of nearly *everyone* turning against Him. The world was basically opposed to this perfect Man. They did so with almost complete misunderstanding of Him, even mocking him for who He really was.

Let’s make sure we review: Jesus had the *power* to come down from the cross, but it was not God’s *will* for Him to do so. Thus it was not *His* will to do so. God’s will was for Him to go farther—to die, and be buried, and *then* to conquer the situation by rising from the dead.

He saved others, and He can also save YOU. He did not save Himself because He had to provide for YOUR salvation. He is in fact the Son of God, and He is in fact the King of Israel. He fulfilled the OT prophecies concerning the suffering servant, and will return as conquering lion of Judah when the time is right.

MAP