

Salem Church of Darmstadt
Lenten Bible Study Series 2019
The Account of Christ's Passion as told by Matthew
Session 5 – April 9, 2019

The Death of Jesus – Matthew 27:45-56

From nine o'clock until noon Calvary had been a very busy place. **The soldiers had performed their various tasks, as was shown in verses 33–38. Bypassers had blasphemed. Chief priests, scribes, and elders had scoffed. Robbers had reviled, though one of them had repented. Jesus had uttered his first three words.** Then, at twelve o'clock, something of a very dramatic character takes place. Suddenly the land becomes dark. Cf. Amos 8:9. The very fact that this darkness is mentioned shows that it must have been intense and unforgettable. Moreover, it occurred when least expected, at high noon, and lasted three hours.

Hendriksen, W., & Kistemaker, S. J. (1953–2001). *Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew* (Vol. 9, p. 969). Grand Rapids: Baker Book House.

So far the story of the crucifixion has focused on the theme of the hostility and mockery of both Gentile soldiers and Jewish bystanders, and Jesus has appeared as the passive, apparently helpless, victim who suffers in silence. Now the picture begins to change, as we see both in the accompanying events and in Jesus' own words and attitude something of the true significance of what is happening. As before, Matthew shows no interest in the physical nature of Jesus' suffering, or the medical cause of death, but **by a series of clear allusions to Old Testament passages continues to point to Jesus' death as the moment of fulfilment**, leading up in v. 54 to a climactic confession of faith from the most unlikely source.

France, R. T. (1985). *Matthew: an introduction and commentary* (Vol. 1, p. 403). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

The cross teaches us that God works in and through the processes of human history to overcome evil. How is he continuing to work in our world's history to overcome evil?

From noon on, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. Jesus had been put on the cross at nine o'clock in the morning. **Death by crucifixion was slow and excruciating, sometimes taking two or three days.** Three hours passed while Jesus put up with abuse from bystanders. Then, at noon, darkness settled over the land for three hours. We do not know how this darkness occurred, but it is clear that God caused it (Matthew, Mark, and Luke all mention this). Some have suggested an eclipse occurred, but Passover was held at a full moon, a time when an eclipse is not possible. Along with the earthquake in 27:51, it could have been a natural event with supernatural timing.

Nature testified to the gravity of Jesus' death, while Jesus' friends and enemies alike fell silent in the encircling gloom. **The darkness on that Friday afternoon was both physical and spiritual.** All nature seemed to mourn over the stark tragedy of the death of God's Son. Some see a fulfillment of Amos 8:9,

where the darkness was a sign of God's judgment: "'In that day,' declares the Sovereign LORD, 'I will make the sun go down at noon and darken the earth in broad daylight'" (NIV). See also Exodus 10:21–22.

Barton, B. B. (1996). *Matthew* (p. 559). Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

The secular historian Thallus, writing about AD 52, records it [the darkness] in his history of the world.

Green, M. (2001). *The message of Matthew: the kingdom of heaven* (pp. 299–300). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

Darkness was one of the plagues in Egypt and occurs in the prophets as a judgment for the end time; both Jews and pagans considered eclipses and other darkenings of the sky bad omens.

Keener, C. S. (1993). *The IVP Bible background commentary: New Testament* (Mt 27:45). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

The physical darkness points to God's judgment on the sin of rejecting his son. Physical signs usually point to a deeper spiritual truth. Do you see the spiritual meaning of this sign at work in our world today?

THE SEVEN LAST WORDS OF JESUS ON THE CROSS

The statements that Jesus made from the cross have been treasured by all who have followed him as Lord. They demonstrate both his humanity and his divinity. They also capture the last moments of all that Jesus went through to gain our forgiveness.

"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."

Luke 23:34

"I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."

Luke 23:43

Speaking to John and Mary, "Dear woman, here is your son... . Here is your mother."

John 19:26–27

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34

"I am thirsty."

John 19:28

"It is finished."

John 19:30

"Father, into your hands I commit my spirit."

Luke 23:46

Barton, B. B. (1996). Matthew (p. 560). Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

Jesus did not ask this question in surprise or despair. **He was quoting the first line of Psalm 22.** The context of this psalm indicates that this was a prayer of expectation for deliverance, not a cry of abandonment. Nonetheless, **the whole psalm is a prophecy expressing the deep agony of the Messiah's death for the world's sin.** Jesus knew that he would be temporarily separated from God the moment he took upon himself the sins of the world because God cannot look on sin (Habakkuk 1:13). **This separation was the "cup" Jesus had dreaded as he prayed in Gethsemane (26:39).** The physical agony was horrible, but **the spiritual alienation from God was the ultimate torture.** Jesus suffered this double death so that we would never have to experience eternal separation from God.

The bystanders misinterpreted Jesus' words and thought he was calling for Elijah. **Because Elijah had ascended into heaven without dying (2 Kings 2:11), a popular belief held that Elijah would return to rescue those suffering from great trouble (Malachi 4:5). He was associated with the final appearance of God's kingdom.** For example, at their annual Passover feast, each Jewish family would set an extra place for Elijah in expectation of his return.

Barton, B. B. (1996). Matthew (pp. 560–561). Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

Not only does Jesus bear the load of humanity's sin, but **he becomes sin on our behalf** (see 2 Cor. 5:21). He became cursed by God for us, "for it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree' " (Gal. 3:13).

Wilkins, M. J. (2004). Matthew (pp. 902–903). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

The question has been asked, "But how could God forsake God?" The answer must be that **God the Father deserted his Son's human nature**, and even this in a limited, though very real and agonizing, sense. The meaning cannot be that there was ever a time when God the Father stopped loving his Son. Nor can it mean that the Son ever rejected his Father. Far from it. He kept on calling him "My God, my God." And for that very reason we may be sure that the Father loved him as much as ever.

Hendriksen, W., & Kistemaker, S. J. (1953–2001). Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew (Vol. 9, p. 971). Grand Rapids: Baker Book House.

Cried (anaboaō, used only here in the New Testament) is a strong verb indicating powerful emotion or appeal to God. This is no dispassionate theological statement, but an agonized expression of a real sense of alienation, reflecting the full meaning of Jesus' death as a 'ransom for many' (20:28).

France, R. T. (1985). Matthew: an introduction and commentary (Vol. 1, p. 404). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

This is, remarkably, the only time in the Synoptic Gospels where Jesus addresses God without calling him 'Father'

France, R. T. (1985). Matthew: an introduction and commentary (Vol. 1, p. 404). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

Part of the whole point of the cross is that there the weight of the world's evil really did converge upon Jesus, blotting out the sunlight of God's love as surely as the light of day was blotted out for three hours. (Matthew probably intends us to see here the start of the fulfilment of Jesus' words in 24:29; **these events are ushering in God's 'last days', which will reach their climax when the son of man is exalted and vindicated, and the Temple is destroyed.**) Jesus is 'giving his life as a ransom for many' (20:28), and

the sin of the 'many', which he is bearing, has for the first and only time in his experience caused a cloud to come between him and the father he loved and obeyed, the one who had been delighted in him.

Wright, T. (2004). *Matthew for Everyone, Part 2: Chapters 16-28* (p. 190). London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.

Matthew 27:46

But abandonment is not the whole story. We must bear in mind that **Jesus cried out, "My God, my God."** The human Jesus felt and gave expression to the abandonment, but **he also retained his trust.**

(Pillar New Testament Commentary Set)

Jesus' death reveals the reality of hell (separation from God), which he endured in our place. Do churches say enough about hell?

The drink of vinegar is another echo of Psalm 69:21 (see above, on v. 34). Its immediate availability suggests that **it was the poska, wine vinegar diluted with water, the usual refreshing drink of labourers and soldiers'** (Blinzler, p. 255) which the soldiers guarding the cross would have for their own use. It was thus **offered as an act of kindness**, to which others in the crowd mockingly objected that, if any relief was to be given, it should be given by Elijah in response to Jesus' supposed appeal.

France, R. T. (1985). *Matthew: an introduction and commentary* (Vol. 1, pp. 404–405). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

Mat_27:50 **This loud cry reminds us once more of Jesus' hideous agony.** Matthew's "he gave up his spirit" ("spirit" here is equivalent to "life") suggests **Jesus' sovereignty over the exact time of his own death.** It was at this moment, when he was experiencing the abyss of his alienation from the Father and was being cruelly mocked by those he came to serve, that he chose to yield up his life a "ransom for many" (see on 20:28).

The Expositor's Bible Commentary

Finally he arrives at the goal. Jesus' death—described by Matthew as 'breathing his last' or 'giving up his spirit'—is **the point towards which the gospel has been moving all along. He has remained obedient to the end**, even through the period of God-forsakenness that formed the heart, strangely, of his God-given mission. **He takes with him, into the darkness of death, the sin of the world: my sin, your sin, the sin of countless millions, the weight that has hung around the world's neck and dragged it down to destruction.**

Wright, T. (2004). *Matthew for Everyone, Part 2: Chapters 16-28* (p. 191). London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.

Matthew 27:50

Most of the crucified were in a state of absolute exhaustion at the end, but **Jesus' utterance of a loud shout does not comply with this and supports the view that to some extent his death was voluntary.**

To the end all four Evangelists refrain from trying to harrow our feelings; they tell their story simply and let the facts speak for themselves.

(Pillar New Testament Commentary Set)

John tells us that Jesus died with a shout: "It is finished" (Jn 19:30). It is finished is in English three words; but in Greek it is one--Tetelestai (<G5055>)--as it would also be in Aramaic. And tetelestai (<G5055>) is **the victor's shout; it is the cry of the man who has completed his task;** it is the cry of the man who has won through the struggle; it is the cry of the man who has come out of the dark into the glory of the light, and who has grasped the crown. So, then, **Jesus died a victor with a shout of triumph on his lips.**

William Barclay's Daily Study Bible

Pastors and theologians speak of the "finished work of the cross". What does this mean?

The darkness lifted (27:45). The substitutionary death of Jesus brings light (salvation) to a world lost in sin, that is, to all those who accept him by means of a living faith.

Hendriksen, W., & Kistemaker, S. J. (1953–2001). *Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew* (Vol. 9, p. 974). Grand Rapids: Baker Book House.

Matthew 27:51

And look (see on 1:20) makes for a vivid introduction to what follows, as the Evangelist goes on to speak of some unusual happenings that accompanied the death of Jesus.

(Pillar New Testament Commentary Set)

τὸ καταπέτασμα τοῦ ναοῦ, **"the curtain of the temple," refers most probably to the "second" (cf. Heb 9:3) or innermost curtain** (cf. Heb 6:19) that separated the Holy of Holies from the rest of the temple (the word καταπέτασμα most often refers to the inner curtain; see Exod 26:31–35) rather than the "outer" curtain that covered the entrance to the temple structure itself. **The splitting of the curtain ἀπ' ἄνωθεν ἕως κάτω, "from top to bottom," together with the passive verb ἐσχίσθη, "was split," implying divine action, points to the event as an act of God (possibly, as Daube suggests, this is comparable to the rending of one's garments because of great sorrow as the high priest does in 26:65).** A remarkable symbolism is involved, which none of the evangelists stops to explain. Clearly, however, the tearing of the veil is a type of apocalyptic sign pointing, **on the one hand, to the wrath and judgment of God against the Jewish authorities (cf. T. Levi 10:3) and, on the other, to the end of the temple, where God is no longer present. It seems also probable, however (pace R. E. Brown, *Death of the Messiah*, 1108–9), that Matthew's church perceived another symbolism in the torn curtain, namely, that by his sacrificial death, Jesus obviates the sacrifices and priesthood, making available to all people a new, bold, unrestricted access into God's very presence.**

Hagner, D. A. (1998). *Matthew 14–28* (Vol. 33B, pp. 848–849). Dallas: Word, Incorporated.

Yet by mentioning only many of the saints, Matthew clearly intends this sign merely to prefigure the final resurrection, proleptically signified in Jesus' death and resurrection (Cullmann 1956a:168). Popular folk religion venerated the tombs of saints (Meyers and Strange 1981:162), and the very people who sought Jesus' death built those tombs (23:29–32); but Jesus, the holiest saint of all, had power to raise them.

Keener, C. S. (1997). *Matthew* (Vol. 1, Mt 27:50). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

And the world itself—the physical, natural world—is the first to respond. As one recent writer has put it, **the end of Jesus is the end of the world in miniature**. In particular, it is the end of the Temple in miniature: the beautiful curtain that hung across the entrance to the inner sanctuary is torn in two, presumably by the force of the earthquake that shook the city. Judgment has been hanging over the Temple for several chapters now in Matthew; the priests have themselves finally rejected Jesus (verses 41–43); now their power base, the centre of their world, receives a symbolic destruction as potent as the action of Jesus himself a few days earlier (20:12–14). **Jesus' death is the beginning of the end for the system that had opposed him, that had refused to heed his summons, that had denied its vocation to be the light of the world, the city set on a hill to which the nations would flock.**

Wright, T. (2004). *Matthew for Everyone, Part 2: Chapters 16–28* (p. 191). London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.

There appears to be a very close connection between these three, the second and the third of the signs mentioned here probably resulting from the first: the earth quaked, the rocks were split, and the tombs were opened. This shows that the death of the Savior had—and still is having—significance for the entire universe. So much at least is clear. There is going to be a new heaven and a new earth (Rev. 21:1), which apart from Christ's atoning death would not have been possible.

Hendriksen, W., & Kistemaker, S. J. (1953–2001). *Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew* (Vol. 9, p. 975). Grand Rapids: Baker Book House.

The “saints” or “holy ones” here must be the righteous Jews (the *δίκαιοι*, “righteous”) of the time before Jesus, perhaps the patriarchs, prophets, or martyrs, although Matthew's readers will be thinking of the eventual resurrection of Christians.

Hagner, D. A. (1998). *Matthew 14–28* (Vol. 33B, p. 849). Dallas: Word, Incorporated.

The NIV placement in 27:53 of a comma after the phrase “they came out of the tombs” along with the insertion of the conjunction “and” may imply that the bodies were raised at the time of the earthquake and then later appeared in Jerusalem. It would seem strange to have raised bodies remaining in a tomb for days until they make their appearance. However, the Greek text has no punctuation, and the conjunction “and” is not in the text. A better explanation is to place a period after the phrase “the tombs broke open” and to begin a new sentence with the next phrase. As such it then reads, “And the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. Coming out of the tombs after Jesus' resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many people.” With this rendering, Matthew indicates the following sequence: (1) The tombs are opened by earthquakes at Jesus' crucifixion; (2) Jesus is raised three days later; (3) the bodies of these holy ones are then raised, and they enter the city and appear to many.

In this way the miraculously opened tombs at the time of Jesus' death are a prolepsis of the resurrection of Jesus, and the bodies of the holy people follow in a mere three days. Their appearance to people in Jerusalem is a witness to the efficaciousness of Jesus' work on the cross and the declaration of his victory over death in his, and their, resurrection. This anticipates Paul's teaching on Jesus being the firstfruits of the dead (1 Cor. 15:20–23).

Wilkins, M. J. (2004). Matthew (pp. 906–907). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

It is now common to speak of the “already ... not yet” character of the salvation experience. What do we already experience because of Jesus' victory on the cross? What do we not yet experience?

Gentile Oppressors Become Models of Faith in Christ (27:54) Whereas Jesus' own people had not believed, **the supervising centurion and those with him recognized Jesus' identity the way Peter had some time before (16:16). In contrast to Peter, however (16:21–22), these Gentiles recognize Jesus' sonship in the cross rather than by ignoring the cross**, all the more remarkable because this defied Gentile models of leadership (20:25).

The Gospel has come full circle: again the religious leaders of Israel have missed the significance of Jesus, whereas the pagans one would expect to be most hostile to Christ have understood and embraced his true identity (2:1–12). Matthew's message to his Jewish Christian audience is clear: regardless of the response of the Jewish religious leaders, you must evangelize the Gentiles. His message to us today is no less clear: although church people often live in disobedience to the gospel and take Christ for granted, we must take him beyond the walls of our churches to a waiting world.

Keener, C. S. (1997). Matthew (Vol. 1, Mt 27:54). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

FEAR AND FAITH

The centurion was right to be afraid. **Fear can be the first step toward faith.** Perhaps later he found some disciples who could explain to him that Jesus really was the Son of God.

Today, people who become afraid like the centurion are often referred to a counselor for psychological help. But it's not just a mind problem here. **It's a soul problem—a faith problem.**

If and when the centurion turned to Christ as Savior, faith took the place of fear in his heart. **That's the real antidote to fear: faith in Jesus. Our fears about death, suffering, loss, tragedy, illness, and even about tough decisions have one important starting point if we hope to overcome them: Jesus.** Let faith in him displace any fear you may have.

Barton, B. B. (1996). Matthew (p. 563). Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

Can a person be well-adjusted without Jesus? What is the role of the psychologist versus that of the minister?

The identity of the actors in this narrative is significant. Because John's disciples took great risk and buried their teacher (14:12), we may expect at least as much courage from Jesus' disciples here (Rhoads and Michie 1982:133). But **Jesus' disciples disappoint us**, leaving the task to characters Matthew's audience would not anticipate unless they had heard the story before (they probably had heard it, but might still be struck by the contrast).

Keener, C. S. (1997). Matthew (Vol. 1, Mt 27:55). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

One of the most important perspectives on **the women is that God used them as witnesses not only to the central redemptive act of history, Jesus' death on the cross and the sealing of the tomb (cf. 27:60–61), but also as witnesses to his resurrection from the dead**. Since the women are present for Jesus' death and his burial by Joseph of Arimathea (cf. 27:55–56, 61), they can verify that Jesus is truly dead, not just unconscious. God is bestowing a special honor on them. **They are exemplary of true discipleship to Jesus, and because of their faithfulness and courage, they are given the special honor of being witnesses to these profound events.**

Wilkins, M. J. (2004). Matthew (p. 911). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

These women could do very little. They couldn't speak before the Sanhedrin in Jesus' defense; they couldn't appeal to Pilate; they couldn't stand against the crowds; they couldn't overpower the Roman guards. **But they did what they could**. They stayed at the cross when the disciples had not even come; they followed Jesus' body to the tomb; they prepared spices for his body. **Because these women used the opportunities they had, they were the first to witness the Resurrection**. God blessed their devotion, initiative, and diligence. As believers, we should take advantage of the opportunities we have and do what we can for Christ.

Barton, B. B. (1996). Matthew (p. 564). Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

The women were faithful in doing what they could. How might unfaithfulness keep us from experiencing God's blessings?
