

Good Friday—2020

“Christ Crucified”

(4/10/20)

Matthew 27:33-37 (NKJV)

³³ And when they had come to a place called Golgotha, that is to say, Place of a Skull, ³⁴ they gave Him sour wine mingled with gall to drink. But when He had tasted *it*, He would not drink. ³⁵ Then they crucified Him, and divided His garments, casting lots, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet: *"They divided My garments among them, And for My clothing they cast lots."* ³⁶ Sitting down, they kept watch over Him there. ³⁷ And they put up over His head the accusation written against Him: **THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS.**

So cruel and barbaric was crucifixion that Rome forbid its own citizens from being crucified—no matter what they had done.

So abhorrent was even the *mention* of crucifixion that—it was taboo as a topic of polite conversation.

One author said,

“We have yet to see an accurate, full depiction of crucifixion in modern media. If it were ever made, it would be limited to adult audiences, because of its intense horror and brutality.”

It’s interesting that none of the gospel writers focus on the details of the crucifixion—Matthew simply records, **“Then they crucified Him...”** (v.35)

This is due in part because the Holy Spirit didn’t want to ‘*sensationalize*’ the crucifixion, but also because everyone in Matthew’s day knew full well what crucifixion entailed—there was no need to emphasize the obvious.

However, what was obvious to them in Matthew’s day—is completely obscure to us in our day.

Crucifixion was originally invented by the Persians.

Historian William Barclay—

“It originated in Persia; and its origin came from the fact that the earth was considered to be sacred to Ormuzd the god, and the criminal was lifted up from it that he might not defile the earth, which was the god’s property.”

Although the Romans didn’t invent crucifixion—they were the ones that perfected it as one of the cruelest forms of execution imaginable designed to produce a slow death with maximum pain and suffering.

So painful was crucifixion that they had to invent a word to describe it—a Latin word we get our English word “*excruciating*” from.

New Testament crucifixions involved the condemned criminal carrying his cross to the place where the execution would take place—which in Jesus’ case was Golgotha.

At that point the cross was laid on the ground and Jesus was made to lie on top of it.

First His feet were nailed to the upright beam and then His arms stretched across the horizontal beam and nailed through the wrists just above the hand, allowing a slight bend at the knees when the body was extended.

The cross was then picked up and dropped into a hole with a ‘thud’ causing excruciating pain as the full weight of His body was now being held on the cross by the nails in His hands and feet.

In his book *The Life of Christ*, Frederick Farrar describes crucifixion as follows:

“A death by crucifixion seems to include all that pain and death can have of the horrible and ghastly-dizziness, cramp, thirst, starvation, sleeplessness, traumatic fever, shame, long continuance of torment, horror of anticipation, mortification of intended wounds—all intensified just up to the point at which they can be endured at all, but all stopping just short of the point which would give to the sufferer the relief of unconsciousness.”

The unnatural position made every movement painful; the lacerated veins and crushed tendons throbbed with incessant anguish; the wounds, inflamed by exposure, gradually gangrened [when a victim took several days to die]; the arteries—especially at the head and stomach—became swollen and oppressed with surcharged blood, and while each variety of misery went on gradually increasing, there was added to them the intolerable pang of a burning and raging thirst, and all these physical complications caused an internal excitement and anxiety, which made the prospect of death itself...a delicious and exquisite release.

One thing is clear. The first century executions were not like the modern ones, for they did not seek a quick, painless death nor the preservation of any measure of dignity for the criminal. On the contrary, they sought an agonizing torture which completely humiliated him. And it is important that we understand this, for it helps us realize the agony of Christ's death." (Vol. 2 [New York: E. P. Dutton, 1877], pp. 403–4)

In an article that appeared in the Arizona Medical Journal, written by Dr. Truman Davis entitled, *"The Crucifixion of Jesus; The Passion of Christ from a Medical Point of View"*—he adds some additional insights into what Jesus would have endured while dying on the cross:

"At this point another phenomenon occurs. As the arms fatigue, great waves of cramps sweep over the muscles knotting them in deep, relentless, throbbing pain. With these cramps comes the inability to push Himself upward. Hanging by His arms, the pectoral muscles are paralyzed, and the intercostal muscles are unable to act. Air can be drawn into the lungs but cannot be exhaled. Jesus fights to raise Himself in order to get even one short breath. Finally, carbon dioxide builds up in the lungs and in the blood stream and the cramps partially subside. Spasmodically He is able to push Himself upward to exhale and bring in the life-giving oxygen...Hours of this limitless pain, cycles of twisting, joint-rending cramps, intermittent partial asphyxiation, searing pain as tissue is torn from His lacerated back as He moves up and down against the rough timber; then another agony begins. A deep crushing pain in the chest as the pericardium slowly fills with serum and begins to compress the heart.

It is now almost over ... the compressed heart is struggling to pump heavy, thick, sluggish blood into the tissues. The tortured lungs are making a frantic effort to gasp in small gulps of air."

It's critically important to remember that Jesus was no victim of circumstances—He affirmed this when He said—*"No one takes My life from Me by force—I lay it down for the sheep of My own will"*. (John 10:17-18)

Matthew 27:33 (NKJV)

³³ **And when they had come to a place called Golgotha, that is to say, Place of a Skull...**

The Latin for *Golgotha* is 'Calvary'—they both mean the *"place of a skull"*.

Some interpret this to mean that Jesus was crucified on a burial ground (cemetery)—a place that was called ‘the place of a skull’ because of all the skulls of dead bodies found there.

However, the Romans didn’t crucify people in remote locations away from the population (as in a cemetery), they always crucified criminals along the roads where they could be looked upon, mocked, spit upon—where maximum humiliation would be heaped upon the person being crucified.

Besides it wasn’t called “*place of skulls*”—but “*place of a skull*”.

I believe this is a reference to a place right outside the walls of Jerusalem (to the north)—which is called today ‘Gordon’s Calvary’ where they have found the Garden Tomb.

And near there you will see a cave in the side of a hill that looks like a skull—the ‘*place of a skull*’ or Calvary where Jesus was crucified.

Matthew 27:45 (NKJV)

⁴⁵ Now from the sixth hour until the ninth hour there was darkness over all the land.

Mark and Luke tell us that Jesus was crucified at the third hour (9am) and from the sixth hour (noon) until the ninth hour (3pm) there was darkness over all the land.

This couldn’t have been an eclipse as some have proposed because it was Passover time and Passover always takes place during a full moon.

During a full moon the moon is on the opposite side of the earth from an eclipse.

I believe that this was a supernatural darkness—almost as if, as one author put it, ‘*the creation could no longer bear to see its Creator suffering on that cross and closed its eyes.*’

Matthew 27:46 (NKJV)

⁴⁶ And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" that is, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"

When Jesus hung on that cross the Bible says in 2Corinthians 5:21 that *"He who knew no sin became sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."*

Habakkuk 1:13 (NKJV)

¹³ *You are of purer eyes than to behold evil, And cannot look on wickedness...*

When Jesus became "sin" (took upon Himself the sins of humanity)—the Father could not have fellowship with Him and "looked away", in other words, the Father forsook the Son at that moment—the first and only time in all of eternity!

Matthew 27:47-49 (NKJV)

⁴⁷ Some of those who stood there, when they heard *that*, said, "This Man is calling for Elijah!" ⁴⁸ Immediately one of them ran and took a sponge, filled *it* with sour wine and put *it* on a reed, and offered it to Him to drink. ⁴⁹ The rest said, "Let Him alone; let us see if Elijah will come to save Him."

Some of those standing near the cross misunderstood Jesus' words—they heard "Eli," but thought Jesus was trying to call for *"Elijah"*.

In Greek the word "Elijah" sounds more like "Eli" than it does in English.

Thinking His lips and throat had become dry; someone thought a drink of wine vinegar would moisten His vocal cords so He could speak clearly—as was prophesied in Psalm 69:21, *"They also gave me gall for my food, and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink."*

Others, said—*"Leave Him (Jesus) alone and let's see if Elijah will come to save Him."*

They were looking for Elijah because of a prophecy God gave to them through the prophet Malachi (4:5) saying that at one point He would send them Elijah.

The Jewish people were especially looking for Elijah to come at Passover time (in orthodox Jewish homes they always set an extra plate at the table for Elijah in the hope he will come and join them!).

Now as we said, Jesus hung on that cross from 9am to 3pm.

Those six hours were divided into two parts: The first three hours were in *light* and the last three were in *darkness*.

During the first three hours Jesus spoke three times—

- a) *“Father forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing”* (Luke 23:34).
- b) Not long after that He said to the penitent thief beside Him, *“Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise.”* (Luke 23:43)
- c) And then He said to His mother, *“Woman, behold, your son!”* and to John (the apostle), *“Behold your mother!”* (John 19:26–27).

Here Jesus is dying a terrible, tortuous death and yet—He still thinking about the welfare of others.

And then from noon to three o’clock darkness fell **“over all the land”** (v.45)—yes on Jerusalem and its suburbs—but historical records indicate it might have affected a much larger area than that.

The Greek word for **“land”** can also be translated *earth*, indicating that—the darkness could have affected the whole Middle East or even the whole eastern hemisphere!

The early church Father Origen reported a statement by a Roman historian who mentioned this darkness.

There was also a supposed report from Pilate to Emperor Tiberius that alluded to the emperor's knowledge of a certain widespread darkness, even mentioning that it was from twelve to three in the afternoon.

During the three hours of darkness the Lord Jesus spoke three more times—

- a) *"I thirst"* (John 19:28)
- b) *"Father, 'into Your hands I commit My spirit.' "* (Luke 23:46)
- c) *"It is finished"* (John 19:30)

When He uttered those final words **"It is finished"** He bowed His head, dismissed His spirit and died.

When Jesus died, three miracles took place—two of them were immediate and simultaneous, and the third miracle was delayed until after Jesus rose from the dead—as Matthew records:

Matthew 27:51-53 (NLT2)

⁵¹ **At that moment the curtain in the sanctuary of the Temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, rocks split apart,** ⁵² **and tombs opened. The bodies of many godly men and women [believers in Jesus] who had died were raised from the dead.** ⁵³ **They left the cemetery after Jesus' resurrection, went into the holy city of Jerusalem, and appeared to many people.**

So, the two miracles that took place simultaneously—

- a) *The veil of the Temple was torn in two from top to bottom.*
- b) *There was an earthquake that split rocks and opened numerous graves in the area.*

The **third miracle** was delayed until after Jesus rose from the dead.

Looking at these miracles in ‘reverse order’—

The first miracle consisted of a group of Jesus’ disciples that had died and were buried in those tombs that had been opened (v.52)—and were resurrected.

After their resurrection—they went into the city of Jerusalem and appeared to many people!

I wish Matthew would have given us a little more about these people—such as:

1. *Did they die again like Lazarus whom Jesus raised from the dead; or, as I believe,*
2. *Did they have glorified bodies and were taken to heaven with Jesus when He ascended back to His Father after His resurrection? (a kind of Rapture preview)*

Why do I believe that—I believe it because of what Paul taught in 1Corinthians 15 about the resurrection.

1 Corinthians 15:20 (NKJV)

²⁰ But now Christ is risen from the dead, *and* has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

Jesus actually rose from the dead on the Jewish feast of Firstfruits.

This feast was in the spring of the year, a time when the first stalks or “*first fruits*” of the barley crop would begin to come up out of the ground.

Barley was planted in the winter and was the first crop to be harvested in Israel—Spring would bring the first fruits of this crop.

And as it would come out of the ground the first stalks of barley would be cut and taken to the Temple on the Feast of Firstfruits and offered to God.

He would accept it guaranteeing that more barley (a bumper crop) would come up out of the ground by the time of the main or ‘great’ harvest.

What seems to have happened was that Jesus rose first (He is preeminent in all things)—and then a group of His disciples, who had died, rose after Him.

And when Jesus ascended back to His Father all of these went with Him and together presented themselves as the Firstfruits of the coming resurrection of all believers in Jesus Christ.

They were accepted by the Father guaranteeing that a great harvest of souls, at the great resurrection (rapture), would come up out of the ground (graves) and be taken to heaven.

The second miracle that took place when Jesus died was an earthquake—

Matthew 27:51 (NKJV)

⁵¹ **Then, behold, the veil of the Temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth quaked, and the rocks were split,**

Earthquakes were not seen on the earth before the Fall of man in the Garden of Eden.

After man fell God has used earthquakes from time to time throughout the centuries as a judgment upon man for his wickedness and rebellion—always locally but someday globally.

Hebrews 12:26-27 tells us that before Jesus returns to establish His kingdom upon the earth God is going to shake this planet so violently that everything that is material will be destroyed and only that which is spiritual will remain (all that is done for Christ and all those who belong to Christ).

The Book of Revelation talks about 3 great earthquakes that will take place during the last seven years before Jesus’ Second Coming.

The last one being so powerful that Isaiah tells us it will split the earth wide open.

Now after this and the return of Jesus to the earth; and after His thousand-year Millennial Kingdom—after all of that another resurrection will take place.

The graves of all unbelievers will be opened, and they will stand before the Lord Jesus to be judged—at the ‘Great White Throne Judgment.’ (Revelation 20:11-15)

This will be the final judgment of mankind, where all unbelievers will be resurrected to stand before the Righteous Judge of all the earth—for the “sentencing phase” of their guilty verdict (pronounced by God in the Garden of Eden upon Adam and all his descendants).

At that time their degree of punishment in Hell will be determined based on how wicked a life they had lived on the earth.

These people will then be cast into the Lake of Fire (Hell) for all eternity.

The third miracle that happened the moment Jesus dismissed His spirit and died was that—the veil of the Temple was torn in two from top to bottom.

Matthew is a Jew writing to a Jewish audience—so his reference to the curtain of the Temple is one that would have been understood by every Jewish reader.

The actual Temple building was divided into two rooms—the first was the Holy Place and the second was the Most Holy Place or the Holy of Holies.

The first room contained the Table of Showbread, the Menorah and the Golden Altar where the priests burned incense while praying for the people.

The second room, the Holy of Holies, originally contained the Ark of the Covenant.

The Ark of the Covenant was a rectangular wooden box measuring 3'9" long by 2'3" high by 2'3" wide—it was covered with gold inside and out and topped with a lid made of pure gold called the Mercy Seat.

It was called the Mercy Seat because once a year on the Day of Yom Kippur the High Priest was allowed to enter through the veil to sprinkle the blood of the sacrifice on it to atone for the sins of the nation—which allowed God to show His mercy to His people collectively for their national sins.

The 'veil' separating the two rooms was literally a 'wall' of woven fabric one layer on top of another.

It measured sixty feet high, thirty feet wide, and twelve to eighteen inches thick.

It was made of seventy-two braids, each consisting of twenty-four cords—the veil was so heavy that it took three hundred men consisting of Levites and priests to hang it!

This veil was a reminder of how sin had erected a "wall of separation" between God and man—and how only the High Priest could approach God to make atonement for the people through the blood of the sacrifice.

When Jesus died on the cross, we read how, the veil of the Temple was torn from top to bottom signifying that God was the One who ripped that thick curtain ("wall") in half not man.

God did this because the O.T. sacrificial system with all of its ceremonial laws had been fulfilled in Christ and had now—passed away!

They (including all mankind) no longer needed animal sacrifices to atone for sin (the blood of which was only temporary anyways)—but now the sacrifice of Jesus as the Lamb of God paid for those sins completely and removed their stain from our lives forever!

We no longer needed a priesthood that would be our mediators between us and God—Jesus is now our Mediator who tore the veil that separated God and man allowing us to have bold access into God’s presence whenever we wanted.

You say, “*How did they know God ripped the veil in two from top to bottom?*”

They knew because the priests were in the Temple at 3pm (the moment Jesus died) offering the evening sacrifice—they heard the sound of God tearing it in two and saw the result before their very eyes.

What did they do?

They eventually—sowed the veil back up! and continued to offer God their religious works and animal sacrifices) as a means of approaching Him instead of realizing that Jesus had paid the price of redemption for all mankind with His own blood thus ratifying the New Covenant.

In the New Covenant all believers are ‘priests’ who are now encouraged to come boldly into the presence of God to offer prayer and praise to Him anytime we desire (in the New Covenant every believer is a priest, and every day is ‘Yom Kippur’ in the sense that we can enter the heavenly Holy of Holies!).

And so now, from God’s perspective there was no more need of temples, mediator/priests, altars, or sacrifices—which is why Jesus said, “*It is finished*” right before He dismissed His spirit and the veil of the Temple was torn in two.

It was His way of saying, “*The work of redemption is done—the payment for sin has been made—it’s now “open house”!!*”

Colossians 2:13-14 (NLT)

¹³ You were dead because of your sins... Then God made you alive with Christ, for he forgave all our sins. ¹⁴ He canceled the record of the charges against us [our debt we owed God] and took it away by nailing it to the cross.

When Paul says in v.14 that Jesus took our sins out of the way by nailing them to His cross—he is referring to a practice by which guilty criminals paid their debt to society.

In Paul's day when a person was convicted of a crime or crimes the authorities would write those crimes on a piece of parchment and nail it to his dungeon door.

When he finished paying for his crimes, they would take the parchment and write across the bottom "tetelistai" which meant "paid in full".

It was then given to him and became his 'receipt', his proof that his debt to society for the crimes he had committed had been paid.

Paul said that Jesus took all the crimes that we would ever commit—all of the sins that would ever be written in our ledger and nailed it to His cross paying our debt and forever taking away the penalty of our guilt!

Which is why Jesus, before He died, from the cross said, "*It is finished* (tetelistai—"paid in full").

Matthew 27:54-56 (NKJV)

⁵⁴ So when the centurion and those with him, who were guarding Jesus, saw the earthquake and the things that had happened, they feared greatly, saying, "Truly this was the Son of God!"

Did this mean that these men were saved simply because they *acknowledged* Jesus was the Son of God?

Not necessarily (James 2:19)—but it definitely demonstrated that the events of Jesus' crucifixion made a powerful impact on the unbelievers standing there by the cross that day.

I hope the impact was so powerful that they all did wind up getting saved.

I don't know about them but—what about you?

They're all dead, you're still alive—you still have time to make a decision about Jesus Christ.

Does His crucifixion have any impact on how you live your life right now, and on what you believe about the life to come?

Does the crucifixion of Jesus cause you to pause and reflect on the heinousness of sin and how only the blood of the sinless Son of God could pay for those sins and allow you to be saved?

There is many a skeptic who believes that when they laid Jesus' body in that tomb and rolled the stone over the opening it meant—game over.

“This Galilean Carpenter shot His mouth off so much, claiming to be Someone great—the Son of God, that He brought the Roman government down on Him and got Himself executed—end of story!”

I'm sure the forces of darkness rejoiced and threw a party to celebrate their victory—*“Jesus is dead—we won!!”*

However, their celebrating was, shall we say, premature—as one old preacher said, *“It might have been Friday—but Sunday was a comin'!”*