

**“In His Steps”**  
*April 7, 2024*  
Matthew 27:33-44

## **I. Introduction**

We had to take a break from our study of Matthew to celebrate Palm Sunday and Easter or Resurrection Sunday. But now we can return to Matthew’s account of Jesus’ crucifixion—**please turn to Matthew 27:33-44.** 1 Timothy 1:15 says, “**Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.**” In today’s Scripture Matthew records the responses of some of those sinners. The physical act of crucifixion would have been terrible, but the insults that were hurled at Jesus must have hurt even more. It was because of God’s love for them and for us that Jesus came to the earth to die. But instead of gratitude, the response of some of those He came to save was and still is ridicule, scorn, and even hatred. There were three different groups of people who hurled insults at Jesus while He was on the cross, beginning with the fickle crowd.

## **II. The Fickle Crowd**

“**Those who passed by**” would include people who were entering and leaving the city on other business as well as those who had gathered there to watch another crucifixion. Some that gathered there may have previously admired Jesus and may have even followed Him for a time. Some may have been part of the crowd that cheered Him when He entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. Some may have applauded Him as He cleared the Temple and as they listened to His teachings throughout the week. There would also be those who had watched the trials and had been part of the mob that demanded Jesus’ crucifixion. They had followed the soldiers to the Place of the Skull to witness the execution they had demanded. The fickle crowd had a place for Jesus but only when He satisfied their needs and wants.

They were fascinated by His teachings and His miracles. But although they appreciated the miracles and were amazed by His preaching, they had no desire for Him to cleanse them of their cherished sins. They had no desire to give Him control of their lives. They had expected Him to be their kind of Messiah. The fact that He had let Himself be arrested, beaten, flogged, and tried before the pagan Pilate while offering no

defense, either verbal or miraculous, was proof enough in their minds that He was not the Messiah—the Messiah whom they and most of Israel wanted and expected.

They were convinced of the charges against Jesus and for that reason they “hurled insults at him.” To emphasize their contempt, they shook their heads. A 1000 years earlier David had predicted these actions—turn to Psalm 22:6-8. Jesus knew what was going to happen and He still came! Quoting the false charge of the Sanhedrin that “He would destroy the Temple and build it in 3 days,” the crowd ridiculed Him for claiming power He didn’t have. Essentially, they were saying that *“If You can really do this miraculous thing, if you are really the Son of God, then surely you can come down from the cross.”* In less than 6 days, the mindless, heartless, wicked, and fickle crowd had gone from acclaiming Jesus as the Messiah to condemning Him as a blasphemer.

Many people today are just like the fickle crowd. They have been raised in the church. They have heard the truths of the gospel many times and know that Jesus Christ claimed to be the Son of God. They may have made a profession of faith and even have been baptized. They may attend church regularly for a while, but when Jesus doesn’t fulfill their worldly, selfish expectations, or answer their every prayer and whim, they lost interest in the things of God. They are willing to have the church attack the evils in society but aren’t quite willing to confess their own sins. They certainly don’t feel a need for repentance and forgiveness. Like those that “passed by”—once they praised Jesus but now, they ridicule Him and want nothing to do with Him.

### **III. The Vehement Leaders**

The fickle crowd may have been wicked, but the most wicked ones to scorn Jesus were the vehement leaders. These were the religious leaders of Judaism; many of whom had spent their whole lives studying God’s Word and all the rabbinic traditions. If any group of people should have known God’s truth so that they could recognize and welcome the Messiah, it should have been these men. Yet they not only opposed and condemned Jesus themselves, but they even persuaded the people to support them in their goal to have Him crucified.

The highest level of Israel's leadership followed Jesus out to Golgotha to hurl their final insults at this One whom they despised for being who He actually claimed to be. Perhaps they felt above addressing Jesus directly as He hung like a criminal on the cross, so they spoke to the crowds as they “mocked Him. ‘He saved others,’ they said, ‘but he can’t save himself!’” If Jesus had saved Himself, then nobody else could be saved. Jesus did not come to save His life, but to give it as a ransom for sinners (Mark 10:45).

In saying that Jesus saved others, these men were acknowledging His miracles which they had never been able to deny. In Mark 3:2 they criticized Him for healing on the Sabbath and in Matthew 12:24 they accused Him of receiving His power from Satan, but the reality of His miraculous power was too obvious and too well known and documented for them to deny. But they were convinced that God was on their side and since Jesus attacked them for their false teachings, they were equally convinced that Jesus was not from God and therefore could not save Himself.

They continued their taunts by saying that if “He’s the King of Israel, let him come down now from the cross and we will believe in him.” They hadn’t believed Him for the truths He taught or for the miracles He had done. If He had come down from the cross, they wouldn’t have believed in Him anymore than they believed in Him after He rose from the grave. One more miracle wouldn’t persuade them to believe.

The only kind of power—natural or supernatural—they were concerned with was power that would serve their own interests. Even if Jesus had been the Messiah the Jews were expecting, the leaders would only pretend to be loyal so that they could get what they wanted. But Jesus wasn’t their kind of Messiah, and they had no desire to follow Him in the way He demanded. They didn’t want to be righteous or holy, they wanted to be successful. They didn’t want to be cleansed from sin; they wanted to be satisfied with themselves. They didn’t want to give up anything for God but wanted Him to give them the worldly, material things they craved and loved. They wanted the Messiah to serve them. Since Jesus wouldn’t do that, they had no use for Him. To their unbelieving and ungodly minds, the fact that Jesus could not or would not save Himself was ultimate proof that He was not the Messiah or the Son of God. In their minds it was inconceivable that the Messiah would die this way or that God would permit such mistreatment to occur.

Earlier in His ministry, Jesus had told them what the definitive sign of His identity would be. **Turn to Matthew 12:38-42.** The final proof that Jesus was who He claimed to be would be His resurrection from the dead as well as His teachings and miracles. The religious leaders were totally blind to what Scripture taught or what Jesus taught about the Messiah's suffering and death. They took Jesus' crucifixion to be the final and conclusive proof that His claims were false. Although they taunted Him to save Himself, He wouldn't. Jesus had to carry out His mission to the very end, because only then would the Son of God truly be able to save humanity.

These men had much to do with religion but nothing to do with God. They claimed to speak for Moses, but they contradicted what Moses taught. They claimed to speak for God, but, in fact, they were His enemies and as Jesus said in **John 8:44**, **"You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire."**

#### **IV. The Guilty Criminals**

Finally, there were the guilty criminals; the two robbers who, on either side of Jesus, joined in the mockery. To be executed in this manner meant that they were cruel bandits who most likely took pleasure in tormenting, abusing and even killing their victims. They may have been part of Barabbas' band and Jesus took Barabbas' place in the middle—the place of the worst of the criminals. As Isaiah had prophesied in **Isaiah 53:12**, **"He was numbered with the transgressors."** Most likely these 2 robbers were Jewish or at least lived in Jewish Palestine. They would have some knowledge of Judaism and the Jewish Messiah. They probably even knew about this *"Jesus of Nazareth"* and that He claimed to be the Messiah. Even in their suffering, they weren't content to ignore Jesus but **"also heaped insults on Him."** We aren't told the specific reason for their hatred of Jesus. Perhaps their wicked hearts just liked to watch others suffer—as another old saying says: *misery enjoys company*.

Luke fills in more details concerning these criminals, **turn to Luke 23:39-43.** In the beginning they both joined the crowd and ridiculed Jesus for His claim to be the Messiah. We aren't told why, but, as Luke wrote, one of the bandits stopped his ridicule and recognized the innocence of Jesus. In spite of the

influence of his companion and the mockery of the crowd, the second criminal put his faith in the dying Christ. This was an amazing faith. The man hoped for some kind of help in the future, but Jesus gave him forgiveness that very day, and he died and went with Jesus to Paradise (Revelation 2:7).

## V. Conclusion

Jesus was the Messiah; He was the Son of God. He could have come down from the cross. He could have rid Himself of the physical pain and all the ridicule from those around Him. But the humiliation and the torment that He felt was why He came to earth. As General William Booth of the Salvation Army once said, *“It’s precisely because He would not come down that we believe in Him.”* The Jews could see God only in Power; but Jesus showed that God is also sacrificial love.

What Jesus experienced on the cross was obviously a demonstration of agape love—a love that needs to grow in every Christian. But there is something else here, too. As well as demonstrating love, Jesus showed us how to suffer for God, physically and emotionally. Jesus didn’t retaliate or get even, and He could have; instead, He prayed *“Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing.”* (Luke 23:34) As children of God, we need to be just as forgiving. As we prayed this morning in the Lord’s Prayer, *“Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.”* (Matt. 6:12) Ephesians 4:32 says, *“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.”* 1 Peter 2:21 says *“To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in His steps.”* Turn to 1 Pet. 4:7-11. As a child of God do you walk in His steps? Are you quick to forgive? Do you love with a sacrificial love? Do the things you do and say bring praise to God?

## Communion Devotion - April, 2024

Matthew 26:17-20, 26-30

John 3:16 says that “God so loved the world that He sent His one and only Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.” In Matthew’s record of the hours leading up to Jesus’ crucifixion, one of Jesus’ disciples betrayed Him in the Garden of Gethsemane with a kiss—a sign of respect and honor. The rest of His disciples ran away so that they wouldn’t be arrested along with Jesus. Later, in the courtyard of the high priest, Peter vehemently denied that he even knew who Jesus was. While the disciples went into hiding, Jesus was taken before several courts of Jewish leaders where people lied about what Jesus had said. In their anger, these same leaders beat and spit on Jesus. Then He was taken before Pilate. In fear of the Jews, Pilate had Jesus beaten, flogged and given to the soldiers. Finally, those soldiers beat Jesus again and then took Him to Calvary to be crucified. Matthew emphasized that through it all, Jesus, in love, didn’t resist or complain.

1 Tim.1:15 says, “Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.” Heb. 7:25 adds, “He is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.” Jesus went through all the hatred, denials, and physical abuse and then died on the cross, so that anyone who accepts His gift of love, will spend eternity in heaven and not in hell. Eph. 2:8-9 says, “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith-- and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God--not by works, so that no one can boast.” If you have accepted Jesus’ gift of eternal life, if He is your Lord and Savior, we invite you to join us in this celebration of love.

The Lord’s Table is a celebration of Jesus’ love—a visual, tangible reminder of what He did in love for you. This morning as you hold the bread and then the juice and think of God’s love for you, ask yourself, “Am I walking in His steps? Do my actions and my words demonstrate my love for the One who died for me? When it comes time for me to stand before God, will I have to hang my head in shame?” Use the quiet time to get things right with God. Confess your sins and pledge with the help of the Holy Spirit to live your life for Him. Echo the words of Joshua in Joshua 24:15, “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”