

“From where does your strength come?”

March 17, 2024

Matthew 27:27-44

I. Introduction

Today’s Scripture brings us to the central purpose of Jesus’ entire earthly ministry. Jesus didn’t come to show how one should live or to give some “words to live by;” Jesus came to bring salvation from sin. As the angel told Joseph before the birth of Jesus in [Matt. 1:21](#), “*She, i.e., Mary, will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus (which means Savior), because he will save his people from their sins.*” The crucifixion of Jesus Christ was an essential part of God’s plan of salvation. We see this when, in the beginning of His earthly ministry, Jesus talked to Nicodemus—[turn to John 3:14-15](#). Matthew recorded 4 different times that Jesus Himself predicted to His disciples that He would “*suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law and that he must be killed*” ([Matthew 16:21; 17:22-23; 20:17-19; 26:2](#)). As Paul wrote in [1 Corinthians 15:3](#), “*As of first importance ... Christ died for our sins.*”

But, while the crucifixion of Jesus Christ was God’s demonstration of His amazing love for mankind, the crucifixion of Jesus Christ was also a demonstration of man’s wickedness. The execution of the sinless Savior of the world was the ultimate demonstration of evil in human history. Jesus’ enemies hated Him so much that they cursed Him and ridiculed Him with their evil words even as He died on the cross. Matthew portrayed 4 groups of people at the crucifixion who cursed and abused Jesus—beginning with the ignorant soldiers and their mocking in the palace.

II. The Ignorant Soldiers

A. The Mocking in the Palace

Although Pilate’s order was to have Jesus “*flogged and ... crucified,*” the soldiers demonstrated their own wickedness by going beyond what basic duty required. As they took Jesus into the Praetorium or palace, they decided to make public sport of Him and gathered the whole company of soldiers around Him to watch the mocking. The company of soldiers consisted of at least 100 soldiers, probably several hundred of them. Following Roman practice, this company would consist of soldiers from neighboring countries, so it is

likely “the company” was made up largely of Syrians, who spoke Aramaic. Since they weren’t Jewish and since they were usually stationed in the Gentile town of Caesarea, the soldiers wouldn’t be particularly familiar with Judaism and may have never heard of Jesus. To them, He was simply another condemned prisoner whom they were free to abuse as much as they pleased as long as He wasn’t killed before His crucifixion. Their torment of Jesus was wicked and inexcusable, and it was done out of spiritual ignorance.

Jesus’ face would have been swollen from the slaps and beatings He had received through out His various trials. Since He had already been flogged, He would be bleeding profusely with terrible gashes across His back. Since the official charge against Jesus was that He claimed to be the King of the Jews, the soldiers took advantage of this accusation and paid “homage” to the king. Pilate didn’t initiate this treatment, but he didn’t oppose it either. He may have been there to watch the proceedings. The soldiers probably shared their commander’s hatred of Jews and took this opportunity to vent this hatred on this Jew condemned by fellow Jews. With every nerve in agony and His body shaking in pain, Jesus became the target of their vicious game.

So “they stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him” which couldn’t help but irritate His exposed, bleeding flesh from the earlier beatings. Mark and John both report that the robe was purple (Mark 15:17; John 19:2). This isn’t a contradiction—“reddish-purple” would be a good description of an old, faded garment that would be used this way. Just as the soldiers clothed Jesus in the scarlet robe, Jesus willingly clothed Himself in the scarlet sins of the world in order that those who believe in Him might be freed from sin. In Isaiah 1:18 the Lord said, “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.” The scarlet robe also reminds us of the scarlet sins Jesus bore in our place.

To add to the pain as well as to the ridicule, the soldiers “twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head.” The purpose was to mimic the wreath worn by Caesar on official occasions. As the mock crown was pressed on His head, blood would run down from the new wounds and mingle with the blood that already covered the rest of His body. The curse of sin on the earth was that “it will produce thorns and

thistles for you” (Gen. 3:18) –thorns like those in Jesus’ crown. Like the scarlet robe, the crown of thorns was another symbol of the sins that Jesus was about to take on Himself. And since a king must also have a scepter, “they put a staff in his right hand.” Finally, to complete their sadistic mockery, the soldiers “knelt before Him and mocked Him saying, ‘Hail, king of the Jews.’”

Then “they spit on him and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again.” It’s as if they were saying, “*Look at how easily we strip You of Your dignity and authority. We beat You with Your own scepter. Where is Your power? Where is Your army to defend You from Your enemies?*” John 19:3 adds “and they struck him in the face” as well.

Jesus took all of this humiliation and pain without speaking or fighting back. As Isaiah prophesied in Isaiah 50:6, “I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard; I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting.” His submission was not a sign of weakness; it was a sign of strength. This was God’s plan. Turn to Philippians 2:7-8. This is why Jesus came to earth—to die on a cross for your sins. John explained that during this time Pilate brought Jesus out before the Jews. Turn to John 19:1-16. As representatives of the people, the chief priests publically rejected God’s Son and declared allegiance to Caesar, a pagan emperor. “After they had mocked him, ... they led him away to crucify him.”

B. The Procession

Along with the other 2 criminals, Jesus was led outside the city to the place of execution—Golgotha - *The Place of the Skull* which in Latin is called “*Calvary*.” The condemned carried the crossbeam or dragged the entire cross to the place of crucifixion. Each victim would be surrounded by four soldiers who would escort the prisoner through the crowds. A placard bearing the prisoner’s indictment was often placed around his neck. That same placard would then be hung above his head on the cross for all to see.

Jesus had been up all night. He had been betrayed and denied. He had resisted the temptations of Satan to the point of sweating blood in the Garden. He had gone through multiple beatings and floggings. By that point, Jesus was in no shape physically, emotionally, or spiritually to carry the cross and this was

slowing down the progress of the group to the place of crucifixion. So, as they were going along, the soldiers forced a visitor to Jerusalem, Simon of Cyrene, “to carry the cross.”

Simon had come from Libya to celebrate Passover at Jerusalem and now he was humiliated by being forced to carry the cross of a criminal he probably didn’t even know! Mark 15:21 identified Simon as “the father of Alexander and Rufus.” The two sons were apparently known to Mark and to many other believers at the time Mark wrote his gospel. Because Mark probably wrote from Rome, Alexander and Rufus may have been active in the church there. Perhaps it was the carrying of Jesus’ cross that led Simon to have faith in Him. What must have started as a forced and resented humiliating experience may have resulted in Simon’s conversion as well as that of his whole family. His son, Rufus, may have been the man Paul greeted in Romans 16:13: “Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother, who has been like a mother to me, too.”

C. The Crucifixion

Finally, the soldiers and their prisoners reached the place of crucifixion. Before the soldiers nailed Jesus to the cross so that it could be placed upright in the ground, they tried to give Him “wine mixed with gall,” which Mark 15:23 called “myrrh.” This fulfilled Psalm 69:2 which says, “They put gall in my food and gave me vinegar for my thirst.” The gall or myrrh was not offered as an act of mercy on the part of the soldiers. It was used to stupefy a victim to keep him from thrashing around while the nails were being driven through his hands and feet. But Jesus did not want His senses dulled, and “after tasting it, he refused to drink it.” As Jesus had already declared in the Garden, first in the prayer to His Father in Matthew 26:39 and then to Peter as He was being arrested in John 18:11, Jesus said, “Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?” He had to endure the full measure of pain—physical, emotional, and spiritual. He would do the will of God in complete control of His faculties.

None of the gospel writers describe the procedure for securing Jesus to the cross—for that matter, they say very little about the actual crucifixion itself. It is only from Thomas’ comments several days after the resurrection that we learn about Jesus’ being nailed by His hands and feet (John 20:25). This was the fulfillment of the familiar prophesy in Isaiah 53:5-6 that we read last week.

It was customary for the soldiers to share the loot at an execution. In addition to a loin cloth, Jewish men normally wore 5 pieces of clothing: sandals, an inner cloak, a headpiece, a belt, and an outer cloak or tunic. The four soldiers divided up various articles of Jesus' "clothes by casting lots." John wrote in John 19:23-24 "the tunic was without seam, woven from the top in one piece. They said therefore among themselves, 'Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be.'" John 19:24 adds, "This happened that the scripture might be fulfilled." Turn to this Messianic Psalm—turn to Psalm 22:16-18.

Having done just that, the four soldiers sat down near the cross and "kept watch over him there." They were required to remain with the victim until his death was certain. They were to make sure that neither friends nor family members could rescue him or seek to reduce his suffering by putting him to death by a swifter means. Jesus was known to be a miracle worker; no one knew how many followers He had or if they were preparing to rescue Him or spare Him a long death. The soldiers needed to be on guard.

As a final mockery of Jesus and an insult to the Jewish leaders, Pilate had instructed the soldiers to put "above his head the written charge against Him: THIS IS JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS." Matthew recorded a shortened version of the placard. John 19:19-20 says, "It read: JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS and it was written in Aramaic, Latin and Greek." Greek was the universal language of the time; Aramaic was the language of Palestine and Latin was the official language of Rome. By using all 3 languages Pilate made certain that virtually every person who passed by would be able to read the inscription. John went on to write that "the chief priests of the Jews protested to Pilate, 'Do not write 'The King of the Jews,' but that this man claimed to be king of the Jews.' Pilate answered, 'What I have written, I have written'" (John 19:21-22).

III. Conclusion

Historians claim that by this time in history the Roman Empire had crucified over 30,000 men. Jesus would not have been the first person these soldiers had ever crucified. I wonder what they thought as they flogged and mocked and crucified this One called Jesus. He didn't fight them. He didn't curse them. He didn't respond as any other victim ever had. As Isaiah 53:7 says, "He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did

not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.” He was different. This is why, after seeing Jesus die on the cross, the centurion who was in charge said in [Luke 24:47](#), “Surely this was a righteous man.”

Why did Jesus allow all this to happen? In [Matthew 26:53](#) He said, “Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels?” But in [1 Tim. 1:15](#) Paul wrote, “Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.” [1 John 4:10](#) says, “This is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.” [Romans 5:8](#) says, “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” In other words, God hated sin so much and loved you so much that Jesus came to bring salvation from sin for everyone who accepts His gift. “If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”

But Christ’s response to the beatings and the cross is also an example to those who call Him Lord and Savior. As Peter wrote in [1 Peter 2:21](#): “To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in his steps.” Martin Luther put it this way: “*If Christ is so firmly planted in your heart, and if you are an enemy to sin out of love and not fear, the suffering Christ may continue lifelong as an example. When tribulation and trouble assail you, think how slight these are compared to the thorns and nails of Christ. If thwarted or restrained, remember how He was bound and dragged. If pride besets you, see how the Lord was mocked and with robbers despised. If hate, envy, and vengeance tempt you, think how Christ for you and all His enemies interceded with tears, though He might rather have avenged Himself. If you are afflicted and cannot have your way, take heart, and say, ‘Why should I not suffer when my Lord sweat blood for every torment?’*”

As we grow and mature as Christians, as hard times as well as easy come our way, our thought and prayer should always be, “What would Jesus do?” But we don’t have to act in our own strength alone; Paul wrote in [Phil. 4:13](#), “I can do everything through him who gives me strength.” When trials and difficulties come your way, do you walk with God’s strength or just stumble in your own strength?