

A King for the World to Crucify

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[0:00] Tonight, we gather to watch Jesus die.

! You see, he's constructed this carefully like a piece of music that builds into one quite literally earth-shaking crescendo.

The music intensifies gradually as we follow Jesus down the steps into utter darkness, as we see him humiliated by his enemies, despised by his people only to be ultimately forsaken by his God. But you see, just when we reach rock bottom, verse 51 to 53, the scene erupts and the great crescendo plays, and it shows us what all this darkness was for, a curtain being torn and the dead being raised.

So the question is, how on earth are we going to walk through a passage like this?

[1:33] Well, I think the only way we can, and that's by sitting back and listening to the music play. So really, for most of this sermon, there's only one goal in mind, and that's for us just to watch Jesus as he gradually descends deeper and deeper into darkness for all those who will trust in him.

But before we start our descent into darkness, before we follow our Savior to the tree, we need to keep in mind some important context, because without it we'll be lost.

The first is that we need to remember that nothing of what we're about to see happened without Jesus' control. We need to remember that the one we follow is the one who could at any moment call down legions of angels to put an end to the whole thing.

And the second is that this is not just some historical events or merely just some tragic ancient history.

No, this is the Scriptures being fulfilled. This is God's plan to save his people being carried out by his willing son, Jesus. So let's keep those two things in mind as we sit back and witness what humanity does to the king we all must bow to.

[3:23] So let's begin by first seeing Jesus being humiliated by his enemies. Because verse 27 picks up straight off from where we left off last week in verse 26.

Pilate washed his hands of him. The crowd shouted to crucify him, and the soldiers scourged him. They ripped and tore his back and body, making him ready for the cross.

But notice verse 27. Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor's headquarters. Seems to be a slight detour.

Why not straight to Calvary? Well, because before the king is crucified, he needs to go and collect his crown. This is what verses 27 to 31 are depicting for us.

It's a mock coronation. I mean, just look at what takes place. They take Jesus into the headquarters where a battalion of Roman soldiers are there waiting.

[4:30] That's hundreds of men. It's not just one or two. No, that's line after line after line of armed soldiers. And what do they do to him?

They strip him. They humiliate him. And put a scarlet robe around his shoulders and a crown of thorns on his head with a reed in his hand.

Robe. Crown. Scepter. Everything you need for a king. And they bow down laughing before him and say, Hail.

King of the Jews. It's tragic, isn't it? And the irony could not be more painful.

Because who has Matthew been showing Jesus to be all the way through his gospel? How does the book first open? Well, chapter 1, verse 1. The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David.

[5:38] Jesus is the great promised king. The one who will rule on David's throne over every land and nation. The king of kings. The lord of lords.

The one who everyone will one day bow before. And here he is, getting stripped and spat on. Here is the king of kings being crowned with thorns.

Here is the king of kings being clothed in a robe that fails to cover his nakedness. Here is the ruler of all being beaten over the head.

There is just something about humiliation that makes us just want to run and hide or lash out in vicious self-defense.

That feeling of being exposed in front of others. That feeling of being at the mercy of someone else. Or the feeling of being mocked and laughed at.

[6:43] It's the stuff of nightmares. That some of you listening know far too well. And if we had the strength or capability to avoid it, oh, we would.

We'd fight tooth and nail to avoid any hints of it. But here Jesus, with the ability to stop it all, doesn't even respond. He just takes it.

He let them strip him. He let them laugh. He let them spit in his face.

He could have put an end to it all. Called down a battalion of angels before they even dare put the crown on his head. Or take the clothes off his body. But no.

He endured it all for me and for you. Jesus is a king to bow to. Because he's the type of king that will take the humiliation his people deserve.

[7:47] I mean, there's a king worth following. There's a king worth bowing to. He's no tyrant. He's no cold, distant figure who's domineering and oppressive.

No. He's a king who lowers himself for his people and will only endure the vilest humiliation for them. Yes, Jesus calls you to bow.

But that's because he bowed even lower. Experiencing humanity at its very worst. That's the kind of king who calls you to himself.

So, we've seen our king being humiliated by his enemies. But now it's time to take one step deeper into the sufferings of our Savior.

As we watch him being despised by his very own people. Look down with me to verse 32. As they went out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name.

[8:57] They compelled this man to carry his cross. Notice that. As they went out. Here we see Jesus being brought out of the city to be crucified.

The city that we saw welcome him with great joy back in chapter 21. With crowds lining the paths with palm branches and cloaks to throw down before his feet. Hosanna, son of David, they cried. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. But now as he leaves, he's been cast out. Bloody and beaten.

So much so that he can't even carry his own cross. I mean, it's quite a contrast, isn't it? And where do they take him?

Verse 33. Galgotha, which means place of a skull. So here we are at Mount Calvary. This is the point that the nails are hammered through his hands and feet.

[10:05] Where he's pinned to two wooden beams and lifted up for the whole world to see. In verse 34. The mockery of the soldiers continues.

As they offer Jesus wine mixed with gall. That's not a nice combo. And they press it up against his lips. But he will not drink it. Verse 35.

They turn the foot of the cross into a casino. As Jesus is hanging in agony, the soldiers are there having some fun. Dividing his garments and casting lots. And to top it all off, they even make sure to put the charge above his head.

With the statement they just mocked him for. Verse 37. And over his head they put the charge against him. Which read. This is Jesus. King of the Jews.

He's rejected and humiliated by his enemies. But what about his very own people? How do they respond to their king after casting him out of the city?

[11:14] Well, verses 39 to 44 tell us. They mock him. And humiliate him. And ultimately they despise him. Verse 39.

Those who pass by derided him. 41. The chief priests, the scribes, the elders mocked him. 44. Even the two criminals either side of him join in reviling him.

Jesus is surrounded by a sea of voices made up of his very own people. As they reject him and despise him. And what is the chorus they all share? The passersby, the scribes, the Pharisees, the elders.

What are they all saying in summary? Jesus, come down from there. Save yourself. If you really are who you say you are.

Come down. Save yourself. That's what's getting drummed into Jesus' ears as he hangs there on the cross. Come down, Jesus.

[12:22] Then we'll believe. You saved others, so save yourself. I mean, if you are the Son of God, come down from the cross. Can you hear the hiss behind the voice of the crowd?

If you are, then just do this. It's the same script we saw Satan use in the wilderness.

If you really are the Son of God, then just make these stones into loaves. Then just throw yourself off from here. Right down to his final breath, Jesus is being tempted to fall.

Tempted to pack it all in. And it's coming from the mouths of his very own people. It's shocking, isn't it? The moment their whole history has been building to, as their saviors dies, to rescue them.

And there they are, calling for him to come down. To save himself. It's tragic. I mean, just think how quickly your patience turns to anger when someone makes a comment that undermines you or calls you into question.

[13:40] Maybe you hear your colleagues call you and your work into question. They make you sound foolish or inexperienced. Or maybe put the blame on you for something you haven't done.

Well, you're ready to fight your corner next time that meeting comes your way. They have no right to be speaking about me like that. If they knew the half I did around here, they wouldn't even dare.

Wait till I show them. I mean, it's a silly example, but illustrates what we're all like. But what does Jesus do? When everyone is calling for him to come down.

When everyone is calling for him to prove himself, to save himself in the middle of agony. Does he go, you know what? Yeah, I will. I'm done with you all.

No. He remains. He continues to suffer while the people who should be praising him are right there rejecting him, mocking him, and despising him.

[14:47] Come down, Jesus. Save yourself. And Jesus' silence screams, no. Now, we really have descended deep into the sufferings of our Savior.

We've seen the humiliation he endured at the hands of his enemies. We've seen his own people despise him and ridicule him. But now it's time to take the last step into the sheer darkness of his sufferings.

To reach the bottom of the pool of his pain. Where, thirdly, we see him being forsaken by his God. Because in verse 45, the lights go out.

Here, darkness covers the light. The great sign depicting God's judgment falls.

The darkest hours in human history have just begun. You can imagine the scene. All those who stood there mocking are now suddenly plunged into darkness.

[16:04] And for three hours, it's lights out. But then, about the ninth hour, a painful cry is heard from the middle cross.

Eli, Eli, Lama Sabathani. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? We've watched him stay silent before the soldiers.

We've watched him stay silent before the mocking crowds. But here, in the darkness, he cries out the very first verse of Psalm 22. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Here, Jesus is drinking the dregs of the cup of God's wrath. It wasn't the nails. It wasn't the thorns that made our Savior sweat drops of blood the night before his crucifixion.

It was knowing that he, the perfect sinless one, was going to be treated like the vilest of sinners. He was going to have to become sin for us, meaning being regarded as guilty for all your sin and mine.

[17:20] He was going to have to be forsaken by his God. Cut off from the favor and the fellowship of his father so that he could experience the full weight of God's wrath.

Eli, Eli, Eli, lama sabbathani is the cry of the damned. The cry of the one who is experiencing the full weight of judgment.

Hearing the words, the Lord curse you and forsake you. The Lord turn his face away from you and condemn you.

The Lord pour out his just wrath upon you. Here, Jesus hangs forsaken. Alone.

Condemned. Now, we can imagine ourselves being forsaken by others. Those closest to us turning their backs, and it's a horrible thought.

[18:30] Imagine your time of grief and pain. You run to your husband or wife looking for a comforting embrace. But no embrace is to be found. The arms that were once your gentle refuge are now clamped shut.

Or you try to phone your mom. She's never not answered when you call, but now when you need her most, the line just keeps ringing. You try your dad, but he hangs up first time you call.

But you see, that rejection doesn't even come close to the torment and isolation Jesus is experiencing. Because Jesus knew what it was to be rejected by those closest to him.

He didn't need to imagine it. The disciples had already fled and left him. But now the unthinkable happens. The worst pain possible of Jesus being forsaken by his God.

No comfort. No reassurance. No answer. As he hangs there all alone. So if you ever wondered what the cross felt like for Jesus, besides that agonizing pain, here we're told, it felt like being utterly forsaken.

[19:50] Like being forgotten by God and being cast off from his presence. I mean, that's really the heart of the whole gospel.

Jesus being forsaken so that we could be brought near. The whole way through, Matthew, we've watched him teach the crowds and call people into his kingdom. Eating with tax collectors and sinners, telling them all to repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

But how is it possible for us to be brought into God's kingdom? Well, it's only possible because the king was forsaken.

The king took the place of his people so that those who were far off could be brought near. He was rejected so you could be accepted.

I never know what it's like to be cast off from God. But you see, in the middle of the darkest moment of the world history, when the sinless Savior is bearing the full wrath of God for his people, what are they doing?

[21:06] Well, once again, getting it all wrong. Just look at them in verse 47. Jesus is crying out to God in his distress, and they think he said Elijah when he said Eli.

I mean, you can see the similarity, but again, the irony is tragic. Jesus is in the darkest place a man can possibly be, bearing the sins and disgrace of all his people, and they're sticking sour wine in his face, saying, here, drink this.

They're looking for Elijah, hoping the scene is going to liven up a little bit. Humanity just keeps getting it all wrong.

But yet again, there Jesus is, completely under control. Because as soon as the cup is drained, and the last drop is swallowed, he cries out again with a loud voice, verse 50, and yielded up his spirit. It's finished. The cup is drained. The suffering is all over. But what on earth was it all for?

[22:29] Because we followed him as closely as we could, down each step of darkness. But Matthew, what possible good can come from so much evil?

Well, now it's time for the crescendo to play. It's been a long wait, but just listen to this. What was it all for?

It was for a curtain to be torn, and the dead to be raised, so that we could enter and live. So first, the curtain.

Now you might be sitting there thinking, really, Joe? All that for a torn curtain, that makes no sense. But you see, the curtain being torn is a visual picture of the reality Jesus' death and sufferings accomplished.

The curtain in the temple was like a big keep-out sign that said, you can't come in because of your sin. You can't come in because of your sin. But Jesus' death has torn that in two.

[24:03] Access into the presence of God is now open to all who will put their trust and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, who will trust Jesus as

their King and Savior.

Because the sin that once kept us from God's presence, Jesus has taken upon himself on the cross. Now let's just be frank for just a minute.

Because if you really knew me, if you saw the thoughts that went through my head, the things I've done and not done, you'd be disgusted. You wouldn't want me in your presence.

You'd keep me at arm's length at best. And guess what? If I really knew you, I'd feel the exact same about you too.

But here, we are shown that people like you and me, who wouldn't have confidence before other people, can now have confidence before God.

[25:05] If our trust is in Jesus, then we are always welcomed into God's presence. No matter what morning we've had, no matter the week, no matter what sins we've given into, we can always come before the Lord assured that we'll never be turned away.

don't believe the lie of the enemy that tells you there are certain times you can't come into God's presence. I mean, really?

You think you can draw near to God after what you've just done? You think you can run to Him now after failing Him so badly? Yes. Yes, I can.

Because the curtain has been torn once and for all and nothing is stopping me now. Not even my sin. Not even my shame.

Because He was humiliated by man so I'd never be humiliated before God. He was rejected and forsaken so that I could be welcomed and accepted.

[26:14] He was treated like a criminal so that I could be treated like a child of the Most High God. And that should encourage us in our moments of sin and shame.

But not only that, brothers and sisters, in all of life, you now have an all-access pass into God's presence. We can start to do what we were created to do.

And that's enjoy walking with God again. We can tell Him about what's on our hearts and minds and do life dependent upon Him.

So if you're sitting here tonight and you still have that nagging voice in your head that tells you that at best He'd just put up with you, just look how much He endured so you could be brought near.

He didn't do all that so that He would just put up with you, don't believe that lie. He did all that so you could be welcomed and accepted into His presence.

[27:25] You really can't come in because He really has dealt with all your sin. But you see, not only did Jesus' sufferings defeat sin, it also defeated death.

I mean, that's what this whole amazing section is about when it talks about the tombs of believers being opened and them coming back to life. In verse 53, He even jumps forward in time to tell us that after Jesus' resurrection, they appeared to many in Jerusalem.

I don't know about you, but before I happened to study this passage, I wasn't too familiar with dead bodies being raised after Jesus' death. I had to reread it a couple of times when I first saw it. I mean, what on earth are we to make of it?

Well, I think just like the curtain being torn in two, it's showing us what Jesus' death accomplished. not only the defeat of sin, but also the defeat of death itself.

Here, we have walking pictures of what Jesus has come to secure for His people. Resurrection life. Now, we are all heading to the grave, and all our bodies are wasting away, and we can't escape that.

[28:55] The one thing you can't outrun is death itself. You might not want to think about it, or you might like to distract yourself from it, but every single person in this room is going to die.

There's a coffin or urn with your name on it, and you can't do anything to escape it. And that's a scary thought.

But every single believer in this room who has placed their faith in Jesus doesn't have to fear that day. Because here on the cross, we see Jesus defeat our great enemy.

The curse of death that has reigned ever since Adam and Eve first fell has now been dramatically reversed. the wages of sin have been paid.

Death has lost its sting. And every believer who now dies in Christ awaits the day when their bodies will be raised to walk the streets of the new creation, not just the streets of dusty Jerusalem.

[30:10] so if you're here tonight and you're feeling your body's weakness and you don't need anyone to tell you it's wasting away, look at what awaits you if your trust is in Jesus.

New life awaits. Being raised in a renewed body to spend eternity walking with your God in his beautiful new creation.

a torn curtain and an open grave are the images we are given for what Jesus' suffering and death have accomplished.

He died so that you might enter. He died so that you might live. So now the question is how are you going to respond to the mocked king?

Well look down with me to verse 54. When the centurion and those who were with him keeping watch over Jesus saw the earthquake and what took place they were filled with awe and said truly this was the son of God.

[31:32] People who we just saw mock and humiliate Jesus. People who laughed at his claim to be a king that we all must bow to are now thinking again.

Before watching the crucifixion to them Jesus was a fraud. But after watching it all take place seeing his suffering feeling the darkness and hearing the earth shake they're filled with awe and say truly this was the son of God.

Truly we got this man all wrong. You see his death did not just result in a torn curtain or some empty graves but the Gentiles confessing Jesus to be someone they are to bow to.

So if you're not a follower of Jesus here this evening if you've not put your trust in him then what you need to do is this you need to bow before the king the world crucified believe that what you have just watched Jesus did that all for you he took all that suffering for you so that you could be welcomed by God and you could look forward to the promise of new life believe this really is the king we all must bow to because he's the king that suffered in his people's place he died so that we might enter he died so that we might live let's pray now in closing heavenly father thank you for sending your son our lord jesus christ to the horrors of the cross so that we could be forgiven so we could be welcomed into your presence and have the hope of resurrection life lord jesus we can only scratch the surface of the agony that you went through for all those that would believe in you but we praise you tonight for what we have just seen and ask that by the work of your spirit it would convince our suspicious hearts that you really do love us that you really do love us so much that you be humiliated in our place that you be cast off so we could be brought near i pray for anyone in this room or listening that has not yet bent the knee by placing their faith in you would you by your spirit cause them to bow to the king that died in their place and lord as we come to sing your praises once again would you make the words we are about to sing come alive to us cause our hearts to sing with our mouths for your glory and our good amen