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Matthew 27:27-66
The Cross of Christ

It would be impossible to exaggerate the importance and significance of the cross of Christ. It's undeniably true that the cross is a ubiquitous symbol of Christianity. People put up crosses in their homes, on their cars, or around their necks to identify with the Christian faith. In our churches, we typically have large crosses hanging up - just like this, on the wall to my left. But perhaps most telling of all is the fact that so many of our favorite, most hymns and Christian songs center around *the cross* - the death of Christ, the blood of Jesus. Christian churches are identified by singing of the "The Power of the Cross," or the "the blood of Jesus" that alone "can wash away all our sins," of the "cross where love and mercy meet," where was "slain by death the GOD of life." We gather to joyfully sing songs of worship and praise to God, and we sing songs like "Nothing but the Blood," Jesus Keep Me Near the Cross," "The Power of the Cross," "In Christ Alone," or "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross."

Why do we do that? What makes the cross so wondrous? After all, it's a symbol of *death*, of *shame*. In the first century, when the New Testament was written, there were no pictures of crosses up in people's homes; no one wore it as jewelry. When someone saw a cross, everyone immediately recognized that it was an instrument of *execution, of death*. The cross symbolized someone being condemned to the death of a heinous criminal; it was not a humane or merciful execution, but a brutal one. It was designed to be a symbol a disgrace and dishonor. For the Romans, it symbolized *political condemnation*, failure, guilt, and shame. For the Jews, it also represented *religious condemnation*, for the Old Testament made clear that everyone "hung on a tree" was to be considered accursed by God.

So how in the world did this instrument of death, this symbol of shame and condemnation, become of hope and salvation, a symbol Christians are proud to identify with? Why is it that we sing of the Cross, of blood, of death? I mean, we have to admit, that on the face of it, that's pretty weird, isn't it? We normally don't encourage to sing about such things, let alone to teach our children to. So what makes the cross of Christ, the blood and death of Jesus, so different, meaningful, so worthy of glory and praise? Well, if you're a Christian this morning,

then the answer should be obvious: the Cross of Christ symbolizes that Jesus willingly suffered and died in our to pay the penalty for our sins; that Jesus died *in our place*, bearing our sin and God's wrath that we deserve; on the Cross, Jesus accomplished and secured *salvation for His people, for anyone who believes in Him, in all the world!* The cross, the death of Christ, lies at the very heart of this good news, this gospel message; it represents that anyone who turns to God and trusts in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus alone is forgiven all sins, declared righteous, and will be raised to eternal life! *That* is the power and significance of the cross! That's worth singing about!

But as central as the symbol and message of the Cross is to the Christian faith, I think it's worth acknowledging that there is a growing temptation for us today, as our culture becomes increasingly secular and post-Christian - there's a growing temptation for us to be *ashamed* or *embarrassed* of the cross. Maybe we're tempted to be embarrassed of the Christian faith it represents all together as the Christian faith is mocked by our friends at school or colleagues at work, or the celebrities we watch on TV or the internet. We're tempted to be ashamed to identify with the Cross of Christ as our college professors, or political activists, or people in media accuse Christianity of bringing about injustice and harm in the world. Maybe we're tempted to be embarrassed by the suffering and death of Jesus. Maybe we're even tempted to be *ashamed of the offensive message of the cross*: the reality of our sin, God's righteous anger against us, the death and eternal punishment that we deserve and justice demands, and our desperate need for a savior to take our place so that God would show us mercy and grace while remaining righteous and just. That's what the cross represents! But that message isn't exactly in vogue today, is it? It's an offensive, scandalous message.

But that gospel message of the cross of Christ is our only hope for salvation and eternal. We can never forget that! We can never lose sight of the centrality of the cross of Christ! And that's exactly why we need the message of Matthew 27:27-66. Our text this morning emphatically reminds us of the *indispensable significance of the Cross!* Over the last two weeks, we've seen Jesus voluntarily allow Himself to be betrayed, arrested, mocked, beaten, and unjustly condemned to death. Matthew has made it overwhelmingly clear that this was no accident, mistake, or failure: Jesus is fulfilling God's plan of redemption! And now this passage unfolds for us the final accounts of Jesus's suffering and death on the cross. But Matthew doesn't focus our attention on the details of *how* it happened so much as to *why* it happened. We see here

that the Cross of Christ reveals 1. *Who Jesus is*, and 2. *What He came to accomplish*. That's what I want us to see this morning.

So point number 1:

I. The Cross of Christ Reveals Who Jesus Is: God's Son and the True King(27:27-44)

Last week, when we looked at the previous passage, we saw that the Roman governor, Pilate, had just condemned Jesus to crucifixion. That took place in the morning. The rest of our passage takes place on that same day. The passage opens in verse 27 with a painfully heart-wrenching scene: Jesus is taken by the Roman soldiers to be mocked, humiliated, and beaten. Since Jesus has been charged with being a rebellious Jewish King, the Roman soldiers would have seen him as a treasonous rebel guilty of trying to overthrow the Roman government in Israel. As such, they mock as a phony king; they put a cheap robe on him instead of a royal purple robe, a painful crown of thorns instead of a real crown, and a reed instead of a scepter - all to mock him with cruel, painful, humiliating irony. They mockingly kneel and cry, "Hail, King of the Jews!" before spitting on him and striking him, showing him dishonor rather than homage and glory.

In verse 32, the scene changes but the cruel violence and mockery continue. They march Jesus outside the city to the site of the cross, at Golgotha, the "place of a skull" (v.33). He is taunted by the Roman soldiers and treated shamefully as they cast lots for his garments (fulfilling Psalm 22:18 in the process). They place Jesus on the cross and further mock and humiliate him by placing a sign over his head, saying, "This is Jesus, King of the Jews." (27:37).

Then Jesus is mocked by the two robbers who were being crucified on either side of him, showing that he was despised and ridiculed even by the guilty criminals (v.38). Not only this, but the Jews who passed by and priests who watch continued to mock him in vv. 39-44, accusing him of not being the "Son of God" as he claimed. They mock and taunt, saying, "He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross... He trusts God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him. For he said, 'I am the Son of God.'" (vv.42-43).

They have no clue what they are talking about, and ironically, speak far greater truth than they realize

A few days ago, I watched a video by Joe Rogan, a famous comedian and podcaster. This particular video was a rant against Christianity, where he claimed that Christianity is bogus and foolish (well, actually, he used much stronger language than that, but I won't repeat the foul language he used), and he accused Christians, even the whole Bible, of just "making stuff up" - that the whole Christian faith is just made up and make-believe. All throughout this video, he just lambasted Christianity, spoke sacrilegiously about the Bible, accused us of all being stupid, and blasphemed against Christ. He claimed that our religion ignores and denies basic historical facts. But ironically, all through his video, he just *made up a bunch of fake "facts"* - he made up and skewered historical information to try and support his argument; but in the process, it actually just showed *that he doesn't have a clue what he's talking about*. For example, he claimed that Christians are all foolish for believing the Bible, even though the New Testament wasn't written until 1,000 years after Jesus was alive. But that's just historically, undeniably untrue! Even secular historians know that! The New Testament - especially the gospels, like this one, the book of Matthew - were written down almost *immediately* after these things took place. The video butchered a bunch of other historical facts, but we don't need to go into that - I'll just say this: to try and disprove the truth of God and accuse God's Word of being made-up and untrue, this guy had to resort to *making up information* and *distorting reality* just to try and prove his point. But that doesn't prove his point at all - in fact, it proves *our point* - that God is Truth, His Word is undeniably true, and try as you might, you can't cover up, erase, or deny the truth!

So as I watched this video, I found myself getting so frustrated. I just wanted to scream at the computer screen, "You have no clue what you're talking about! You have no clue how wrong you are!" Well, I think that's the same kind of feeling Matthew expects us to have as we read verses 27-44. It's impossible to read this text as a Christian and not feel that way, isn't it? They are mocking Christ's claims to be King - and yet, that's exactly who Jesus is. The Jews, even the robbers being crucified alongside him, are mocking Jesus for His claims to be the Son of God - and yet, that's *exactly* who Jesus is.

They speak far truer words than they realize - Jesus *truly is* the King; He is the true Son of David, the King of the Jews - He is the Messiah! And not only this: He is the King of all Kings, for He will inherit the nations; His Kingdom will conquer and reign over the whole world!

Those who mocked Jesus didn't know how wrong they were; better yet, they didn't know how *true* their ironic words turned out to be. But mocking the truth didn't disprove it or make it go away. It was all part of God's plan of redemption. It was all part of making the truth they despised become plainly known. In fact, some of these very soldiers who mocked Jesus ended up believing, not only in His Kingship, but even His divinity! The "centurion" commander and the other soldiers with him, who were crucifying Jesus, saw everything take place and "they were filled with awe and said, "Truly this was the Son of God!"

He is the Son of God; they taunt Him for not saving Himself, even though He claimed that the "temple" would be destroyed and He would "rebuild it in three days." And yet, that's exactly what's happening and being fulfilled at this exact moment, when He's on the cross and they are mocking Him! Jesus is the true Son of God - God the Son, the Second person of the Trinity, eternally One with Father, equal in power and glory; He is the God-Man, God the Son who took on flesh, God dwelling as a man, among humanity! In other words, Jesus is the *true temple*: the temple signifies the dwelling place of God amongst His people. Jesus is the *literal* dwelling place of God among humanity - God who *assumed* a human nature, living among us as one of us! He is the *true temple, the very dwelling place and full presence of God come down to us!* And on the cross, the temple of God - the physical body of Jesus - was destroyed. As they mocked him, they were witnessing his very words being fulfilled. And this was in order to fulfill what He promised - three days later, He would rebuild that temple, His body; three days later, He would rise from the grave, defeated death forever! Why? *Because He is God - God the Son, the God-Man!*

Jesus could save himself and come down from the cross at any moment, if He wanted to. But He didn't - He stayed on the cross, He willingly suffered and died, because Jesus, the glorious God-Man, the Messianic King, is also the Suffering Servant. He came not to be served but to serve; not to save himself, but to save others - to save us! He came to *save sinners from the wrath of God we all deserve!*

Application: So if you ever find yourself in the situation where your Christian faith is being mocked and you're being accused of naive foolishness for believing all of this - whether it's by some guy on a video, or by your friends, classmates at school or colleagues at work, your college professor, or even your boss - whatever their claims, whatever they're trying mock you with, rest assured: *we have no reason to be ashamed of the cross of Christ!* That person mocking

Christianity might demand proof in order that they believe, to convince them intellectually; but it's not intellectual unbelief - it's moral unbelief. This text shows us that there were even *eyewitnesses* of the life, work, teaching, and even death of Christ on the cross - yet that eyewitness proof wasn't enough for them, and they still mocked! If the non-believing world who actually *saw Jesus* mocked Him, then we should not be surprised when the non-believing world mocks Christ today, or mocks us for believing in Him and following Him. When that happens, be encouraged: the truth of who Jesus is *will come out; it can't be suppressed*. There is coming a day when Christ will be revealed to all Creation as the God-Man, coming on the clouds of glory, and every knee will bow before him; every tongue will confess Christ as King, as Lord, as God! That truth is objective and undeniable; it doesn't matter how many people try to mock and reject it now. And if we bow the knee to Christ today, we're on the *right side* of history, the winning side, not the wrong side.

But we can also take heart and endure whatever mockery comes our way because we know it's worth it; it's worth it, because we know that Christ endured mockery *for us* in order to *save us from our sins!*

This is because...

II. The Cross of Christ Paid the Penalty for our Sin and Satisfied God's Wrath (27:45-56)

The rest of our passage, verses 45-56, tell us about the actual of Christ on the cross. But the death itself only takes up one small verse; unlike a lot of sermons we hear about the cross, and unlike one very popular movie, Matthew does not draw our attention to the gruesome details of the crucifixion; instead, he draws our attention to the *significance and meaning of Jesus's death* - namely, that Jesus died on the cross as a substitute for his people - that is, in our place - in order to redeem us from our sin. That's the point of the rest of the passage: Jesus is fulfilling God's plan of redemption by dying in the place of sinners, bearing God's wrath upon Himself, the wrath we all deserve.

We see this in the circumstances surrounding the moment of Jesus's death, and in Jesus's final words.

The first sign that happens, tipping everyone off that something special is happening, occurs in v.45: even though in the middle of the day, the sky goes dark; from "the sixth hour," about noon, "there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour," which was about 3

o'clock in the afternoon. We had a total eclipse just a couple of years ago, and as amazing as it was, it didn't last 3 hours, did it? Clearly, this was something unique, a miracle of God. It seems that this grabbed everyone's attention - we don't see anymore mocking after this, do we?

But there's a greater significance to the darkness as well - it's a sign of judgment. In Amos chapter 8, in the context of GOD proclaiming judgment upon the land and upon Israel, the LORD declares, "I will make the sun go down at noon and darken the earth in broad daylight."

Then, in the midst of this darkness, Jesus makes this point even more explicit as he cries out, with his final breath, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (v.46). This is a quote from Psalm 22, a Psalm also alluded to earlier when the soldiers cast lots for Jesus's clothes. In that Psalm, David is lamenting that his enemies are wrongly afflicting him, but the Lord has done nothing to stop it or deliver him. So Jesus quotes this to acknowledge that he isn't coming down from the cross, and God isn't going to stop his death from happening - in fact, he's expressing that he's being *abandoned* by the Father on the cross. Now, we know that Jesus is the God-Man. He didn't cease to be God in this moment - as God, He was always united to God. But this doesn't make His suffering, death, or abandonment by God any less real or painful - Jesus truly suffered, died, and was cursed and abandoned by the Father *in His humanity, as a human man*.

Now, why would this happen? Why would Jesus, the Son of God in the flesh, who is One with the Father, be abandoned by the presence of God in this moment, his darkest hour? It's because, in this moment of his death on the cross, *He was bearing God's wrath against our sin*. He was bearing *God's judgment against sin*. Our sin separates us from God, making us His enemies who deserve death and God's divine judgment - and that's exactly what Jesus entered into and experienced for us on the cross.

The bystanders and onlookers don't get it, though; in verses 47-49, they think he's crying out for Elijah to save him, until "Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit" (v.50). And in that moment, as Jesus died, creation itself reacts; when the first Adam sinned, was cursed by God in judgment, and cast out of GOD's presence from the Garden of Eden, so the land itself was also affected; and so when Jesus, the Second Adam, was cursed by God and judged *for our sin*, the earth itself is affected: the earth shakes with a violent earthquake, so that the rocks were split.

But something else splits, too, in v.51: "And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom" (Now, this wasn't just some coincidence, or just a detail to show us

how powerful the earthquake was - no, this is a theologically significant event, showing us how *powerful and effective the substitutionary death of Christ was!* The curtain in the temple of God symbolized that we are separated from God because of our sin; we are wretched sinners and God is holy - our sin broke our relationship with God, so that we cannot dwell with Him. The presence of God is not a safe place for sinners! It is a place of wrath and judgment, because He's the good guy and we're the bad guys! Every single one of us has sinned and rebelled against our Creator and GOD; we've committed cosmic treason; and we all deserve to spiritual death, eternal judgment in Hell, cast out of the goodness, holiness, and love of God's presence *forever*.

But that's exactly why Jesus willingly went to the cross: he came to *redeem us from our sin*. And at the moment of His death, *God poured out His wrath and judgment on Christ* - not because Jesus deserved it, but because *we do!* He bore it in our place! And at the moment, *the curtain tore in two*; at that moment, when the flesh of Christ was torn for us, Christ opened up the way back to God for us - through Him! When we trust in Christ - when we are *in Christ by faith* - then God looks at us as though *we were the ones on the cross, bearing His wrath!* And because Jesus bore God's wrath against us, then if you're trusting in Christ this morning, *there is no wrath of God, no condemnation left for you!* When Christ died, the wrath of God you and I deserve was satisfied! When Christ died, the curtain was torn - so that we who believe in Christ have been *reconciled* to God, in His death! Jesus *swapped places with us*, so to speak. He died in our place, as our substitute, bearing the penalty for our sin.

And because of that, we can enter the curtain into the Holy of Holies - the true Holy of Holies, the very dwelling place of God in Heaven! And this means we get to dwell with God forever, in God's place, as His redeemed, reconciled people!

In fact, we even see a foretaste of this resurrection Christ accomplished for us in vv.52-53, where many people who had died were brought back to life. I think we're supposed to assume that, like Laarus, these are people who were really resurrected and would one day die again. But it shows us that because Christ died in our place, for our sins, He accomplished salvation for us, so that we who believe in Him will not perish - we will be raised to everlasting life!

All of these events signified the importance of Christ's death - so much so that the Roman centurion overseeing the execution and soldiers with him were "filled with awe, and said, "Truly this was the Son of God!"

The Cross of Christ is where Jesus accomplished our salvation; it's where Jesus died in the place of guilty, condemned, hopeless sinners - which describes *all of us*, every single person in this room, every single person ever to live! Jesus, as the perfectly righteous God-Man, went to the cross in our place, as our substitute, representing and bearing our sin and guilt before God the Father; and as He suffered and died, He was actually being afflicted with the full wrath of God against our sin, which we all deserve. And He did so as a substitutionary sacrifice *for us, in our place!* So that He pays the penalty for all of our sins so that we don't have to; so that we are forgiven, reconciled to God, and will live with Him forever!

But only if we repent and believe in Christ! Christ's died to redeem guilty sinners from our sins; His death is sufficient to save *anyone in all the world who believes!* And that means *only* if we believe; only if we repent and turn away from sin, false religious views and idolatry, and unbelief of this world, and turn to Christ *in faith*, trusting that His substitutionary life, death, and resurrection accomplished everything necessary to pay the penalty that our sins deserve, that we might be forgiven, reconciled to God, and raised to live with Him forever!

If that describes you, if you're a believer this morning, then hear this glorious gospel truth that is a reality for you because of what Christ has done: *you are completely forgiven of all your sins! There is no wrath of God left for you! He has accepted Christ's sacrifice in your place, as full payment for your sin and guilt!* The curtain has been torn; you have been *reconciled to God*, with a restored relationship! And He *will hold you fast and raise you to eternal life with Him!*

If you're not a believer this morning, if you haven't repented, put your faith in Christ, and followed Him as a Christian, then I want to tell you that everything I just said *can be true for you too!* Simply turn to Christ in faith; believe this good news and *trust in Christ to save you!* That's it! Simply turn to Jesus, believe the good news you've just heard about who He is and what He has done, and *trust Him* to save you by His grace! He has promised that He will. And then, once you do that, tell your neighbor sitting next to you; come and talk to me. And then be baptized, to make your faith public, beginning your walk with Christ and joining His church.

If you have any questions about any of this, about becoming a Christian, baptism, or church membership, I would love to speak with you. You can come now or find me after the service. Let us pray.