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Matthew 27:27 - 28:15

The Cross and Resurrection of Jesus Christ

Spring is a wonderful time of the year: the snow finally melts away; the weather warms up; the grass turns green and we all look forward to sunny summer days and for the flowers to bloom. And of course, nothing ushers in Spring quite like celebrating Easter. But Easter is not meant to be just another trite cultural ritual that marks the passing of the seasons. Easter celebrates the true story of *the gospel*: that salvation for sinners has come in the person and work of Jesus Christ, the God Man, who offers salvation as a free gift for all who trust and believe in the sufficient, finished work of His perfect life, death on the cross, and resurrection!

This is the good news that we call the gospel and celebrate! This gospel is our very DNA as believers! We need to remember and celebrate it every *week*, not just every year; we need to preach it to ourselves *daily*! I hope this is true for you. In fact, this is why we gather together every *Sunday*, the first day of the week: the Lord's Day, when Christ rose from the grave. In a very real sense, every Sunday is Easter Sunday! But it's also appropriate for us to set aside Easter as a *special* celebration of the resurrection of Christ. So this morning we're looking at the very center of the gospel story: the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Maybe this story is overly familiar to you. Maybe it's new. Maybe you've heard it before, but it still hasn't taken hold of your heart and changed your life. Whatever the case may be, as we set our eyes on the cross and empty tomb of Christ this morning, I pray that the Lord would open your eyes afresh to the beauty of the gospel, the good news of who Jesus is and what He has done, and that all of us would respond in faith and worship Him. First, the cross shows us who Jesus is...

I. The Cross of Christ Reveals that Jesus is the True King and Son of God (27:27-44)

Our passage opens in verses 27-31 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 Him 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 watched continued to mock and deride him, “Wagging their heads and saying, ‘You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the Cross’” (vv.39-40). “He saved others; he cannot save himself. 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).

From a worldly, human perspective, the cross looks like failure, doesn't it? There Jesus is, hanging naked and shamed, mocked and humiliated, scourged and beaten, suffering and dying on the cross. He appears to be a phony king, an insurrection gone wrong. It appears to be a failure; his message appears to be powerless, proven wrong, ending in humiliation, weakness, defeat, and death. This is how many today still view the cross of Christ; this is the view of the world, the view of unbelief. Every single person in the world has to come to a verdict of what the cross of Christ displays: either failure or victory, weakness or power, death or life, unbelief or faith. Many despise the cross of Christ. Many are embarrassed and ashamed of it. But the only Christian response is to *cling* to the cross, to believe that in the plan of God, the cross reveals *who Jesus is!*

Those who mocked Jesus didn't know how wrong they were; better yet, they didn't know how *ironically true* their 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. They are mocking Christ's claims to be King - and yet, that's *exactly* who Jesus is. 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! They are mocking Jesus for His claims to be the Son of God, yet, that's *exactly* who Jesus is. In fact, some of these very soldiers who mocked Jesus ended up believing, not only in His Kingship, but even His divinity! In verse

54, 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!”

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 have saved 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!* Which leads us to our next point...

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

Verses 45-56 tell us about Christ dying on the cross. It’s a gruesome death; but 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 substitutionary sacrifice for his people - that is, in order to die in the place of sinners who repent and believe in Him, securing our redemption. That’s the point of the Cross: 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 several years ago, and as amazing as it was, it didn’t last 3 hours; it was over in a moment. 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, the same Psalm referenced 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 *forsaken and afflicted* 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 Jesus truly suffered, died, 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*. The bystanders and onlookers don’t get it, though; 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: 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.” 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 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! 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!* If you're trusting in Christ this morning, *then Christ has borne God's wrath against your sin, and there's no condemnation left for you!* Jesus *swapped places with us*, so to speak. He died in our place, as our substitute, bearing the penalty for our sin. 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! This means we have "confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened up for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh" (Heb. 10:19-20).

Through believing in the sacrificial, atoning work of Christ, 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 Lazarus, 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!

And we can have assurance of this salvation and eternal life for ourselves because the death of Christ was not the final word: *He secured our salvation in His own resurrection*. This leads us to point 3...

III. The Resurrection of Christ Powerfully Revealed and Fulfilled God's Work of Redemption (27:57 - 28:7)

We need to see here, plain and clear, that God was sovereignly orchestrating all of these events in such a way that there would be *no other possible explanation* other than to say that *God miraculously raised Jesus Christ up from the grave*. Verses 57-61 make it very clear that Jesus truly died and was buried. Then, verses 62-66 show us that the tomb was sealed and guarded, making it very clear that there's no other possible explanation for the empty tomb other than this: *God miraculously raised Jesus from the dead, powerfully revealing the resurrection as the climactic moment of God's plan of redemption*.

We see this in chapter 28, verses 1-7. First, we read that Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb, and we know from Mark's gospel that they were coming to the tomb in hopes of anointing Jesus' body with some spices. Matthew gives us a glimpse of the dramatic way in which this had happened in verses 2-4, which I think is given to us as a bit of a flashback.

In other words, Matthew is telling us what happened *right before* the women arrive. And what he tells us is dramatic. Earlier that morning, there had been a great earthquake as an angel from heaven came down and rolled away the stone in front of Jesus's tomb. The angel's appearance was so majestic that he shone "like lightning," and his clothes "were white as snow" (v.3). There were guards posted around the tomb, guarding it; but when they saw the angel, they were overwhelmed with fear; they "trembled" and "became like dead men" (v. 4) - that is, they passed out on the ground.

Now, when the women arrived, they expected to find the tomb still sealed up, with Jesus's dead body still inside. But what they saw when they arrived was nothing like what they expected. The stone was already rolled away and sitting on top of it was this glorious angel. Other accounts, like John 20, mention two angels; Matthew doesn't contradict that, he just focuses on the spoke, saying, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay" (vv. 5-6). And in that moment, everything was changed. Before this moment, we've seen Jesus quietly going like a lamb to the slaughter, willfully allowing himself to suffer, to be mocked, to have the truth veiled, to appear weak - but no longer. The time for that is over. Now, Jesus's full identity is being unveiled as His work of redemption is finished.

That Easter morning, as Christ rose from the grave, God was *vindicating His Son, Jesus Christ*. Christ had been pronounced a cursed blasphemer, executed as a criminal, a false King and Messiah; God Himself had even poured out His own wrath upon Christ on the cross! But

now, when God raises Him from the grave, God *vindicates* Jesus and declares Him to be His righteous, blameless Son, the God-Man, the True King, Messiah, and Savior! He proclaims that Christ's sacrificial death has been accepted, atonement made, and that Sin, Satan, and *even death* have been defeated in the death and resurrection of Christ! He was declaring that *death will not have the last word*. Christ was raised to new life, a new creation. He rose Lazarus and others to life - but they were still brought back to *this life*, with bodies that would still grow old, get sick, and eventually die again. But this is not true of Jesus's glorified, resurrected body - He was raised with a new, perfectly glorified body! He defeated death and overturned the grave once and for all!

And here's the glorious news of what that means for you and me - for those of us who are trusting in Christ this morning: *death will not be the last word for us either!* There is coming a day when every pain you're experiencing, every sickness or disease you battle, every sorrow you bear, every tear you cry, every fear you fear - one day *it will be no more!* Death will not be the last word - *you will be raised to eternal life in Christ*, to live with God forever, with a glorified, resurrected body! You'll no longer grow old, get sick, go hungry, feel pain, or sadness; you'll no longer be mocked or suffer, or experience the heartbreak of your rebellious children, your loved ones who keep making all the wrong decisions. There's coming a day when you'll no longer have those persistent migraines and back pains, no longer need hip and knee replacements, no longer need medication or help of any kind, no longer need crutches or rods in your legs. There's coming a day when you'll never say goodbye to another friend or loved one who dies. There's even coming a day when *you and I will never sin against God or our loved ones ever again!*

And that's because the resurrection of Christ secured *our resurrection!* The same power of God that raised Jesus from the grave will raise us up to live with Him in paradise forever!

But only if we respond rightly - in *faith*. Which leads us to our final point...

IV. The Resurrection of Christ Demands that We Believe and Worship Him (28:8-15)

Christ's resurrection accomplished salvation for us - but we only receive it if we *come to Christ in faith*. In other words, Christ's resurrection demands that we respond by *believing in Christ* - who He is and what He has done - *and worshiping Him*. That's the right response of faith. The rest of chapter 28 makes that very clear by giving us two contrasting responses to the resurrection: one of faith, the other of unbelief.

We see a negative response of unbelief in verses 11-15: the religious leaders denied the resurrection of Christ; they refused to believe. They heard that the tomb was empty from the guards themselves, that the sealed tomb had been removed and Jesus was gone. They knew there was only one possible explanation: Jesus, the man they killed, really was the God-Man, the Messiah, the Savior and King! But they didn't want that to be true. So they rejected the resurrection in unbelief, paying off the guards to spread lies instead. Matthew shows us *how not to respond*.

But right before that, in verses 8-10, Matthew gives us an example of the *right way to respond*. We see this as Jesus shows up, revealing himself to the women, and takes center stage of this text, putting the spotlight squarely on him. As the women ran to tell the disciples what had happened, "behold, Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" The last time these women, his faithful followers, had seen Jesus, he had died on the cross and was buried in the tomb. And now, having just miraculously arisen from the grave, he shows up and says, "Hey!" That just makes us smile, doesn't it? It resets the tone of the scene altogether: this is no longer a time for mourning, but it's now a morning of *joy*, because Jesus is alive!

When the ladies saw him, "they came up and took hold of his feet and worshiped him" (v. 9), and this is striking; only God is allowed to be worshiped, but Jesus didn't rebuke them. This makes it very clear that Jesus is the God-man, God the Son incarnate; He is worthy of worship and He knows it! So He does not forbid them to worship Him; this is the right thing for them to do - and the right thing for *us to do*. We rightly respond to Jesus by *worshipping Him*.

But third, we see the amazing grace of our Lord Jesus. Jesus reiterates the same command the angel gave to the women: go and tell the disciples to meet the risen Jesus in Galilee. Now, the last time the disciples interacted with Jesus, they *abandoned him*; Peter even denied knowing Jesus three different times. Talk about ending on a low note; a moment full of shame, regret, embarrassment, and guilt for the disciples. Talk about beating yourself up. This group of disciples would have known full well at that moment that *they were not worthy of Jesus's acceptance*. They would have known very well that they blew it. Yet Jesus speaks of word of *grace* for them here. The angel's command to the women had been, "Go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him" (v. 7). The first instructions after the resurrection were words of comfort and acceptance to a group that had proven themselves unworthy of such acceptance.

But that's not enough for Jesus. He wants to assure. So, yes, the women are obeying, as they depart quickly and are running to tell his disciples, filled with "fear and great joy," but Jesus wants more for them than that. He wants them to realize that they don't have to be filled with fear, so he appears to them on their way, saying to them, "Do not be afraid" (v. 10). And he wants his disciples to know that he doesn't just think of them as his followers but as his very own brothers, saying, "go and tell *my brothers* to go to Galilee, and there they will see me" (v. 10). Brothers and sisters, that's our Lord. That's how loving and gracious and merciful he is. That's how much he loves us. He doesn't just forgive and accept us, he wants us to know that "He is not ashamed to call [us] brothers" (Heb. 2:11). This is the gracious heart of Christ.

As Jesus reveals His resurrected glory and grace to these women, they respond rightly: they grab His feet and worship Him in faith. And that's *exactly how each one of us should respond as well*. Christ has risen from the grave! Jesus is alive - proving that He is who He said He is: the true King, the only Savior, God Himself! He is worthy of all worship, honor, and glory! His resurrection demands that we repent from sin, turn to Him in faith, believe in who He is and what He has done - and live our lives *following, obeying, trusting, and worshipping Him!* And when we behold the glorious grace and love of Christ for us, why would we *not* want to respond this way?

So that's exactly how we need to respond to the glorious good news of this passage this morning. We should repent, trust in Christ, and worship Him every day, with all of our lives! But we also have the privilege to physically, visibly respond in faith and worship this morning by celebrating the Lord's Supper together, in just a few moments. We're going to have a brief moment of silence, where I invite you all to pray silently to the Lord, before I lead us in prayer. And if you're a baptized believer in good standing with a gospel preaching church, then we invite you to come to the table with us as we celebrate the glorious good news of Christ's resurrection and its power to raise us to eternal life with Him!

But if that doesn't describe you this morning, then we ask for you to just remain seated, because there is a *different* way for you to respond: the next step for you is to *believe in the good news you've just heard*, to trust that Christ's life, death, and resurrection really is sufficient to save you from your sins and bring you to eternal life! And then, make your faith public by being baptized. If you have any questions about that, I would love to speak with you after the service.

Let us have a moment of silence as we prepare to come to the table.