

Teachings of Jesus

Gloria Dei Lutheran Church

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Jesus' Teaching in the Gospel of Matthew (Part XII)

27:1-2, Jesus' second appearance before Pilate.

Jesus stood before the governor: History tells us Pontius Pilate was a cruel and ruthless governor, unkind to the Jews, unswayed by notions of compassion, and contemptuous of almost every motivation except the drive to gain or keep power. Here, he seems almost out of character in the way he treats Jesus. Perhaps Jesus affected him in a unique way.

Matthew condenses the full account, telling us only of the second appearance of Jesus before Pilate. The first appearance is described in Luke 23:1-6. Hoping to avoid having to make a judgment about Jesus, which was clearly a religious argument and not a legal matter, Pilate sent Him to Herod, the Jewish ruler in Galilee (Luke 23:6-12). Jesus refused to say anything to Herod, so He was returned to face Pilate again.

Are You the King of the Jews?: When they brought Him to Pilate, the Jewish leaders accused Jesus of promoting Himself as a king in defiance of Caesar (Luke 23:2). The plot was to make Jesus appear to be a dangerous revolutionary set out to harm the Roman Empire. So this question is a logical starting point for Pilate, though it probably had a sarcastic ring to it given that by this time Jesus had already been beaten and mistreated. His outward appearance certainly would not have been "kingly."

It is as you say: No majestic rhetorical defense here from Jesus, and no instant miracle to save His own life. Instead, Jesus gives Pilate the same simple reply He gave to the high priest in 26:64. This, Pilate did not expect, hence his follow-up question, "Do You not hear how many things they testify against You?"

Jesus' submission here is not to Pilate or Roman authority, and certainly not to the false charges Him, but to the Will of His Father.

Charles Spurgeon suggests:

"[Pilate] had seen in captured Jews the fierce courage of fanaticism; but there was no fanaticism in Christ. He had also seen in many prisoners the meanness which will do or say anything to escape from death; but he saw nothing of that about our Lord. He saw in him unusual gentleness and humility combined with majestic dignity. He beheld submission blended with innocence."

27:26-31, Jesus is Scourged and Beaten

When he had scourged Jesus: This was a brutal, terrible punishment. Typically the blows of scourging would lessen as the criminal confessed to his crimes due to the pain. Jesus remained silent, having no crimes to confess, so the blows continued with full strength.

The scourge was a whip comprised of multiple leather strands, each having sharp pieces of bone or metal at the ends. It would wrap around the body, and tear at the skin on the return stroke, reduced the back to raw flesh. The goal of the scourging was to weaken the victim to a state just short of collapse and death, and would typically minimize the time the victim would need to remain on the cross. Sometimes a criminal would die from the scourging, even before crucifixion.

David Guzik:

"Scourging was a legal preliminary to every Roman execution, and only women and Roman senators or soldiers (except in cases of desertion) were exempt." (Dr. William Edwards in the article "On the Physical Death of Jesus Christ" from the Journal of the American Medical Association, 3/21/86)

Gathered the whole battalion around Him: A regular group of four soldiers – called a quaternion – would have been more than enough to carry out the execution. Yet they gathered the whole battalion – which could be as many as 600 men – around Him. Pilate's battalion was likely not a full battalion of 600, but it was all of Pilate's available bodyguards except perhaps a few on his personal detail, a much larger armed force than necessary. This was not to prevent Jesus' escape, or to prevent a hostile crowd from rescuing Him (the crowd wanted Him to die!), or to keep His disciples away (no threat

there). None of that would have been necessary. This was to humiliate Jesus.

“Hail, King of the Jews!”... stripped Him... put a scarlet robe on Him... crown of thorns... a reed in His right hand: Everything about this was intended to humiliate Jesus. The Jewish rulers had already mocked Jesus as the Messiah (Matthew 26:67-68). Now the minions of Roman mocked him as king.

When a prisoner was crucified, they were often nailed to the cross naked, simply to increase their humiliation. Jesus hasn't been crucified yet, but His humiliation had begun, and He was publicly stripped.

Kings and rulers often wore scarlet, because the dyes to make fabrics that color were expensive. The scarlet robe was intended as cruel irony.

Kings wear crowns, but not crowns of torture. The thorn bushes of that region have long, hard, sharp thorns. This was a crown that cut, pierced, and bloodied the head of anyone who wore it.

Kings hold scepters, glorious, ornate scepters that symbolize their power. In their mockery of Jesus, the soldiers gave Him a scepter – but a thin, weak reed.

They bowed the knee before Him: Kings are honored, so they offered mocking worship to this King.

“Hail, King of the Jews!” was no doubt in mockery of the Jews of the region as much as Jesus. These men were accustomed to being hated by the people in this region, had many skirmishes with the zealots (read “terrorist cells”) from among them, and no doubt would prefer to serve in any of a number of other postings than here in this place as part of Pilate's force.

Then they spat on Him, and took the reed and struck Him on the head: Now they escalate from mockery to cruelty. They seized the ironic scepter, took off the mock-royal robe, and began to hurl their spit and their fists at the head of Jesus.

So even before the cross, Jesus stood in the place of sinners.

And led Him away to be crucified: The march to the crucifixion was useful advertising for Pilate and Roman rule. It warned potential troublemakers that this was their fate should they challenge Rome. Normally a centurion on

horseback led the procession, and a herald shouted the crime of the condemned.

Barclay:

“The criminal was led to the scene of crucifixion by as long a route as possible, so that as many as possible might see him and take warning from the grim sight.”

As Jesus was led away to be crucified, He was – like most prisoners sentenced to of crucifixion – forced to carry part of the wood He would hang upon. The weight of the entire assembled cross could reach 300 pounds. The upright beams of a cross were usually permanently fixed in a visible place outside of the city walls, beside a major road. It is likely that on many occasions, Jesus saw the very upright He would hang upon.

The criminal would be forced to carry the crossbar, which would weigh 75 or more pounds. While carrying the crossbar, he was usually stripped naked, and his hands were often tied to the wood.

When Jesus said, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me” (Matthew 16:24), this is the scene He had in mind.

Everyone knew what the cross was – an unrelenting instrument of death and only death. The cross wasn’t about religious ceremonies; it wasn’t about traditions and spiritual feelings. The cross was a way to execute people.

27:32-33 On the way to Golgotha

A man of Cyrene, Simon by name: Simon was probably a visitor to Jerusalem, a faithful Jew there to celebrate the Passover. Visiting Jerusalem, he was far from Cyrene in North Africa, about 800 miles away.

They compelled this man to carry His cross: We don’t know how much Simon knew about Jesus, and it’s reasonable to assume he had no desire to be associated with anyone who was condemned to die as a criminal. Yet the Romans offered no choice. Perhaps Simon was chosen because he was an obvious foreigner, was more conspicuous in the crowd, and looked to be a strong man. However, we have reason to believe that Simon really did come to know what it meant to take up one’s cross and follow Jesus in all senses of

the phrase, as there is evidence to suggest that his sons became leaders among the early Christians in Mark 15:21 and Romans 16:13.

...A place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull): This was a specific location just outside the city walls where people were crucified.

So why do we sometime call it “Calvary” instead of “Golgotha”? “Skull” in Latin is “calvariae”, and in Jerome’s Vulgate it is translated “Calvariae locus”, literally “Place of a Skull”! So *both* Golgotha and Calvary are accurate names for the exact same location. But sometimes one fits better in the lyrics of a hymn or song. 😊

Whether the hill itself had the appearance of a skull I do not know. I’ve not seen any pictures or artwork indicating that. So perhaps it was named that because it was the place of execution and death.

27:34-44, The Crucifixion

They offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall, but when he tasted it, he would not drink it: It was customary to give those about to be crucified a pain-numbing (and mind-numbing) drink, to lessen their awareness of the agony awaiting them. But Jesus refused any numbing drug. He chose to face the spiritual and physical terror with all His senses intact.

The Bible spares the gory descriptions of Jesus’ physical agony, simply stating “then they crucified Him.” Everyone in Matthew’s day was well acquainted with the terror of crucifixion, a method of execution thought to have originated in Persia. But the greater aspect of Jesus’ suffering was spiritual, not physical.

Remember that Jesus did not suffer as a victim of circumstance. He was in control. He said in John 10:18 regarding His own life, “...no one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself”. It is terrible to be forced to endure such torture, but to freely choose it out of love is remarkable. Can we ever rightly doubt God’s love for us again? Has He not gone to the most extreme length to demonstrate His love?

Divided His garments, casting lots: Jesus lost even His clothing at the cross. He was nailed to the cross as a naked, humiliated man. He became *completely* poor for us, so we could become completely rich in Him.

That it might be fulfilled: Even in all this sin, pain, agony, and injustice God guided all things to His desired fulfillment. It may seem that Jesus has no control over these events. Yet the invisible hand of God guided all things, so that specific prophecies were specifically fulfilled.

Sitting down, they kept watch over Him: They weren't worried about Jesus rescuing Himself, but rather they needed to prevent His followers from rescuing Him.

THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS: In John 19:21 we read that the religious leaders among the Jews objected to this title. They felt it was false, because they did not believe that Jesus was the King of the Jews. They also believed it was demeaning, because it showed Rome's power to humiliate and torture even the "King of the Jews." Yet Pilate would not alter this, and when asked to take down the inscription he answered, What I have written, I have written (John 19:22).

Then two robbers were crucified with Him, one on the right and another on the left: We know from Luke's account that one of these robbers repented and trusted in Jesus, and one did not (Luke 23:39-43).

And those who passed by blasphemed Him, wagging their heads: In the midst of His staggering display of love, Jesus was not honored. Instead, He was mocked; He was *blasphemed*.

Ironically, and perhaps significantly, they mocked Jesus for who He really was (and is):

- They mocked Him as Savior
- They mocked Him as King
- They mocked Him as a believer who trusted in God
- They mocked Him as the Son of God

They acted as if Jesus did what they said, they would believe Him. Yet it is precisely because He did not save Himself that He can save others. **Love** kept Jesus on the cross, not nails! Jesus did greater than come down from the cross; He rose from the dead.

27:45-56, The Death of Jesus

Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour.: This was approximately from 12:00 noon until 3:00 in the afternoon.

This unusual darkness lasted for some three hours. This was not the entire time Jesus was on the cross, but the later part of that time. According to Mark 15:25 and 15:34, we can surmise that Jesus hung on the cross for about 6 hours, between about 9:00 in the morning and 3:00 in the afternoon.

This darkness was especially remarkable because it happened during a full moon – during which time Passover was always held – and during a full moon an eclipse of the sun is impossible. Solar eclipses occur only during the new moon phase.

Spurgeon:

“The darkness is the symbol of the wrath of God which fell on those who slew his only begotten Son. God was angry, and his frown removed the light of day...The symbol also tells us what our Lord Jesus Christ endured. The darkness outside of him was the figure of the darkness that was within him. In Gethsemane a thick darkness fell upon our Lord’s spirit.”

Clarke:

Phlegon, Roman historian wrote: “In the fourth year of the 202nd Olympiad, there was an extraordinary eclipse of the sun: at the sixth hour, the day turned into dark night, so that the stars in heaven were seen; and there was an earthquake.”

“My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?”: In quoting Psalm 22, Jesus declared His fulfillment of that prophecy, in both its agony and in its exultation. The Psalm continues to say, You have answered Me. I will declare Your name to My brethren; in the midst of the congregation I will praise You (Psalm 22:21-22).

Jesus had known great pain and suffering (both physical and emotional) during His life. But until this point He had never known separation from His Father. At this moment, He experienced what He had never experienced.

In this moment, a divine transaction was taking place. God the Father regarded God the Son as if He were a sinner. Paul would later describe it this way, *“God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself at the cross.... God made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him”* (2 Corinthians 5:19,21).

Horrible as this was, it fulfilled God's good and loving plan of redemption. Therefore Isaiah could say in Chapter 53:

He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.

But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.

All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.

By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people?

And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth.

Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand.

Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities.

I'm not sure we can fully grasp all of this, but at some point between this utterance and before Jesus died, before the veil was torn in two, before He cried out "It is finished", an awesome spiritual transaction took place. God the Father laid upon God the Son all the guilt and wrath our sin deserved, and He bore it in Himself perfectly, totally satisfying the wrath of God for us.

This man is calling for Elijah: Sadly, Jesus was misunderstood and mocked until the bitter end. These observers thought it was all an interesting test case to see if Elijah would actually come. Not only did they get wrong what they heard (Jesus said, "Eloi" not "Elijah"), but they also only heard one word of what He said.

Jesus cried out again with a loud voice: Most victims of crucifixion spent their last hours in complete exhaustion or unconsciousness before death. Jesus was not like this; though tremendously tortured and weakened, He was conscious and able to speak right up to the moment of His death.

F. F. Bruce:

“The Fathers found in the loud cry a proof that Jesus died voluntarily, not from physical exhaustion. Some modern commentators, on the contrary, regard the cry as the utterance as one dying of a ruptured heart.”

John 19:30 tells us that Jesus said, “It is finished,” which is one word in the ancient Greek – tetelestai, which means, “paid in full.” This was a cry of victory, because Jesus fully paid the debt of sin we owed, and finished His eternal purpose of the cross.

And yielded up His spirit: No one took Jesus’ life from Him. Jesus, in a manner unlike any other man, yielded up His spirit. Death had no righteous hold over the sinless Son of God. He stood in the place of sinners, but never was or became a sinner Himself. Therefore He could not die unless He yielded up His spirit.

Remember John 10:17-18: *“I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again.”*

St. Augustine:

“He gave up his life because He willed it, when He willed it, and as He willed it.”

The veil of the temple was torn in two: A heavy veil separated the holy place from the “most holy place”, or “holy of holies” in the temple. It was a vivid demonstration of the separation between God and man. Notably, the veil was torn from top to bottom, and it was God who did the tearing.

Acts 6:7 tells us that many of the temple priests “became obedient to the faith.” Perhaps the tearing of the veil demonstrated to them the greatness of the work of Jesus. This is probably how the torn veil became common knowledge, too – the temple priests would have told this story!

The earth quaked, and the rocks were split: Nature itself was shaken by the death of the Son of God.

The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many: This is amazing, but we aren't told very much. Apparently these resurrected saints would die again, like Lazarus. But it was a clear sign that Jesus's death effected new life!

Truly this was the Son of God! The scene at the crucifixion of Jesus was so striking that even a hardened Roman centurion confessed that this was the Son of God. This man may have supervised the death of dozens or even hundreds of other men by crucifixion, but he knew there was something absolutely unique about this crucifixion – and more specifically, about Jesus. Note, though, that he utters this statement in the past tense, so he probably didn't know anything about Jesus's words to His disciples pointing to his own resurrection on the third day.

There were also many women there, looking on from a distance, who had followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to Him: Jesus not only made an impact upon rough and hardened men like the Roman centurion, but He also made an impact on women, even women like Mary Magdalene, the once demon-possessed woman who followed Jesus from Galilee (Luke 8:2.)

27:57-61, The Burial of Jesus

He (Joseph) went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus: Customarily, the bodies of crucified criminals were left on their crosses to rot or to be eaten by wild animals. But the Jews wanted no such horror on display during the Passover, and the Romans were known to grant the corpses of executed men to friends or relatives for proper burial.

And Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen shroud and laid it in his own new tomb He wrapped it in a clean linen cloth: Joseph followed the burial customs of that day – the best he could, considering that they had very little time because the Sabbath was imminent (Luke 23:54).

Interestingly, Jesus came into the world from a virgin's womb, and he was resurrected from a "virgin" (unused) tomb. No body had ever been set in that tomb, so that when a body came forth and the tomb was empty, there was no possible confusion as to which body it was that came forth!

He rolled a great stone to the entrance of the tomb and went away: This was the customary way to seal an expensive tomb. A rich man like Joseph of Arimathea would have his tomb carved into solid rock, with one or more compartments where bodies of the family were laid out after being somewhat mummified with spices, ointments, and linen strips. Customarily, the Jews left these bodies alone for a few years until they decayed down to the bones, then the bones were placed in a small stone box known as an ossuary. The ossuary remained in the tomb with the remains of other family members.

The door to the tomb was typically made of a heavy, circular shaped stone, running in a groove and settled down into a channel, so it could not be moved except by several strong men. This was done to ensure that no one would disturb the remains.

John 19:41 tells us that this tomb was close to where Jesus was crucified. Joseph probably didn't like it that the value of his family tomb decreased because the Romans decided to crucify people nearby – yet it reminds us that in God's plan, the cross and the power of the resurrection are always permanently and closely connected.

27:62-66 The Tomb is Sealed and Guarded

On the next day: Barclay: "It must mean that the chief priests and Pharisees actually approached Pilate on the Sabbath with their request. If they did that, it is clear to see how radically they broke the Sabbath Law."

We remember...how that deceiver said, "After three days I will rise": How ironic that Jesus' enemies remembered His promise of resurrection better than some of His own disciples!

While He was still alive: With this, there is no question that Jesus really was dead. Or at least those responsible for crucifying Him did not believe the so-called "Swoon Theory," a conjecture that denies the resurrection, saying that Jesus never really died, but just "swooned" on the cross, and then somehow revived in the tomb.