

“Punished for Me” // Matthew 27:27–56 // *Instead of Me #4*

Happy Palm Sunday weekend, everybody. It’s a big weekend for us... Good Friday RDU, Easter, week of prayer, and today, as our CP’s mentioned, we’re going to offer **a chance for you, at all campuses, to be baptized.**

- Some, are already prepared, but we’re going to offer a chance for anyone...
- We have **everything you’ll need.**
- Baptism, in the NT, is the public proclamation...
- In Scripture, it is always by immersion as a confession of your faith.
- “Baptized as a baby.” We say, that is great. But that was an expression of your parents’ faith. And we thank God for it. **But in the NT it is always, without exception, an expression of your own.** So, it’s time to ratify that with a declaration of your own.
- It is our **first act of obedience as believers, declaring** we are going all-in with him.

That will happen at the end.

Matthew 27, if you have your Bible. Here’s a question: **Has there ever been an event that you and someone else **interpreted entirely differently?****

I remember **hearing the story of 4 people** sitting across from each other in a little stall on a train. On this side was a college basketball

Works Consulted:

“The Final Hour,” Tim Keller

“Crucified for Me,” James MacDonald

“The Last Place,” Thabiti Anyabwile

“Forgives Sinners,” Craig Groeschel

player and his coach; on the other a beautiful college-aged girl with her grandma. The basketball player and the girl are obviously hitting it off, giving little flirtatious glances...

- Well, all of a sudden, **they go through a short tunnel**, and for a few seconds it is totally dark on the train, during which time 2 distinct sounds heard: the smack of kiss, and then the immediate slap of face
 - **The girl thinks:** I sure am glad he kissed me. But I wish my grandma hadn’t slapped him.
 - **Grandma thinks:** I can’t believe he had the audacity to kiss her, and I am glad she slapped him.
 - **The Coach, who is rubbing his face, thinks:** I can certainly understand why he kissed her, but I think that girl smacked the wrong guy
 - **The basketball player thinks:** Awesome. I got to kiss that girl *and* slap my coach.

You probably haven’t had that experience, but you’ve probably had some experience you and someone else interpreted in very different ways. Well, today, we’re going to talk about **the event that has been interpreted in more divergent ways** than any other event in history...

Very few people, of course, debate whether Jesus died. It is why he died that causes the debate.

- **Ghandi** wrote in his autobiography in 1894, *“I can accept Jesus as a martyr. His death on the cross was certainly a good example. **But that there was anything else to his suffering (like dying as a substitute for sinners), this my heart can never accept.**”*
- I’ve been in an audience where I heard **Bart Ehrman** asked the question of what would make him believe and he said had Jesus

fulfilled his promise to bring peace on earth. Instead he died, which represented his failure of his mission.

- **Richard Dawkins calls the** Christian understanding of the cross “divine child abuse.”

Of course, many people are not this openly hostile, but I’ve heard a number of people say things like, “*God—I understand the need for him. But I don’t get the big deal about Jesus?*”

That’s what we are going to press into today. We’re going to walk through the actual moments of the crucifixion and see what clues Matthew puts in there for why it happened.

And then, we’ll **do what we’ve done** on the previous weeks of the series—we’ll see how the responses of the people surrounding the events give us pictures of how we respond to Jesus.

27:27 And after ordering Jesus to be flogged, Pilate handed him over to be crucified. Then the governor’s soldiers took Jesus into the governor’s residence and gathered the whole company around him. **28** They stripped him and dressed him in a scarlet robe. **29** They twisted together a crown of thorns, put it on his head, and placed a staff in his right hand. And they knelt down before him and mocked him: “Hail, King of the Jews!” **30** Then they spat on him, took the staff, and kept hitting him on the head.

When we talk about the crucifixion, we tend to breeze through this moment and focus only the actual crucifixion.

- **But this part was equally cruel and terrifying.**
- First, “the whole company” (20 or 30 soldiers) circled him like a mob, kicking him, punching him, mocking him, like the cruellest

bullies surrounding a helpless child on a school play yard, or a gang fight, delighting in his pain until he was barely conscious.

- **When they were finished**, Jesus would have been barely able to stand up, covered in spit, humiliated, and quivering in pain.

Then they flogged him.¹

- **The whole process of crucifixion had** been designed to put someone through the worst kinds of pain without killing them quickly or letting them slip unconsciousness.
- The **Persians had invented** it, and the **Romans perfected it**.

I found an **article in the *Journal of the AMA***² that describes the process of flogging and why it worked like it did.

- They used a short whip called a “flagrum”—or, “cat of 9 tails,” with several braided leather thongs with small iron balls and sharp splinters of sheep bone knotted in at various intervals.
- The victim was stripped of his clothing and his hands tied high up on a post, the idea being that the flesh on his body would be stretched out tightly so it would tear easily.
- **Then 2 soldiers**, one on each side, would with alternating strokes to deliver the beating. Their goal was to weaken the victim to a state just short of death or unconsciousness.
 - This article says, “as the Roman soldiers repeatedly struck the victim’s back with full force the iron balls would cause deep contusions, and the sheep bones would cut into the skin and subcutaneous tissues of the victim. Eventually the lacerations of the whip would tear into the underlying skeletal muscles and produce quivering ribbons of bleeding flesh. Pain and blood loss generally set the stage for circulatory shock.”

¹ Help in this section taken from James MacDonald, “Crucified for Me,” from *Jesus in My Place*, Harvest Bible Chapel, 2004.

² *Journal of the Medical American Association* entitled “On the Physical Death of Jesus,” from March 21, 1986.

³¹ After they had **mocked him** (finished all of this), they stripped him of the robe, put his own clothes on him, and led him away to crucify him.

- The crossbeam would have weighed **about 200 pounds**; it would have been placed on his back with a placard hung around his neck stating his crime.
- The **crossbeam itself would have been recycled**, which meant it still reeked with the gore of previous victims, roughhewn and full of jagged edges and splinters.
- He was then **paraded through the streets** before jeering crowds with two Roman soldiers marching in front of him and two in back.
- Often, someone in the crowd would come in and punch them or spit on them as they walked by.

³² As they were going out, they found a Cyrenian man named Simon. They forced him to carry his cross.

- **Jesus was so weakened from the beating** that he eventually collapses, and a random man in the crowd was chosen to carry his cross.
- (Here's a question: **Why does Matthew include his name?** He's giving us eyewitness testimony. **Names like this in the Gospels** like this function like first century footnotes—living people the readers could go ask.
- **The Gospel of Mark takes it a step farther and indicates that Simon was the father of Rufus.**³ Why tell us his son's name? Because evidently Rufus's name meant something to the readers—they recognized him. Get this: Paul **greeted a man named Rufus by name** in Rom 16:13, and **scholars think we have really good reason to think it is the same Rufus**, because **why include the name in Matthew if people didn't recognize it?** They were supposed to read this and be like, Rufus's dad was there? Rufus, is this all accurate?

³ Mark 15:21

³³ When they came to a place called *Golgotha* (which means Place of the Skull), (in Hebrew, the Latin word for skull is 'calvaria,' where we get our word 'Calvary.' Historians speculate that it was a hillside cliff that looked like a skull.) ³⁴ they gave him wine mixed with gall to drink. But when he tasted it, he refused to drink it. **Wine mixed with gall was a popular narcotic** of the day, a painkiller. **Why did Jesus refuse it?**

- **It's not that he was against painkillers...** just: **Do you remember how a couple of weeks ago as we walked through Gethsemane** I pointed out that the reason God gave Jesus a glimpse of the cross before he went to it was so that we could see Jesus go to the cross voluntarily—knowing full well what he was about to experience, so that we might understand even more clearly the depth of his love for us? Jesus was demonstrating the depth of God's love for us and had to undergo the full horrors of the wrath of God to deliver us.⁴
- **The value you place on something is shown by what you'll give up for it.** He showed us the value he placed on us by what he was willing to give up for us.

And, vs. 35, then they crucified him: One scholar explained, "Here's how crucifixion worked: **(remember it was designed to keep the victim alive in as much pain as possible for as long as possible without letting them slip into shock.)** It *"involved dizziness, cramp, thirst, sleeplessness, hunger, traumatic fever, humiliation and shame, piercing wounds, ripped tendons.*

The way they kept you conscious was by putting you through **cycles of pain.** When one thing was about to make you pass out, crucifixion would make you switch to something else that would keep you conscious: Here's how it worked:

⁴ Romans 3:28; 5:8.

- You hung down, suspended by your arms (your feet were nailed so they couldn't support you), suspended by nails through your wrists. Your shoulders and elbows would pop out of joint.
- The **blood vessels around the stomach** became swollen and gorged with surcharged blood.⁵
- **As you were hanging down** you couldn't breathe, and you'd start to suffocate, so **you'd hoist yourself up by your arms** to take a breath, which pulled on the nails in your hands.
- **Not only did this cause excruciating pain** from the nails grinding against the bone and from your shoulders being out of joint, but almost immediately *cramps seized the muscles, and you'd have to let go.*
- **From the hanging position you could draw air** into your lungs but not exhale it. So, at that point where you felt like you couldn't hold your breath any longer, you'd pull yourself up again to let take another breath, and down again you'd go.
- For 6 hours Jesus alternates between searing pain and the panicked feeling of suffocation. Each time he pulled himself up or let himself slide down, his back, lacerated by the whips down to muscle and bone, would be further torn-open by the splintered center-beam of the cross.
- *Eventually, the victim would give up and die by suffocation.*⁶

This was what Jesus was pointing to when he held up the bread and the cup and said, "This represents my body, broken for you; my blood poured out for your sins."

- This was **the cup of God's wrath** against our sins.
- "He was **wounded for our transgressions**—our small acts of *rebellion, our little lies, our refusal to let him be in charge, to let him be the center, to steal the glory for ourselves*—he was bruised for our iniquities. The chastisement for our peace was placed on him, and by his stripes we are healed."

⁵ Frederick Ferrar, *The Life of Christ*,

People say, "Well, this is all really moving, but **what would his suffering** have to do with *my sin*?"

- **I once had a Muslim tell me**, "Why would God need someone to die to forgive my sin? If you sin against me, I don't say..."
- "That's a superficial understanding of forgiveness... true forgiveness is always costly."
 - **For example**, if you borrow my car, take it out, wreck it, and offer to pay for it...
 - **Or, say you slander me**—lie about me and ruin my reputation. How can I respond? Well, I could respond in kind—do whatever I can to hurt your reputation. And that would make me feel a little better, because justice had been served. I made you take the pain you caused me.
 - **But if I choose to forgive you**, to not respond in kind, what happened to the pain? I absorbed it.
 - If you've ever really had to forgive someone of true injustice, you know it is deeply costly. You have to choose to absorb the pain of injustice rather than redirect it back on the person that deserves it, and in doing that it feels like you are killing part of yourself.
 - **True forgiveness, you see, is always costly.** To forgive means you absorb in yourself the pain caused by someone else's sin.
- At the cross, **God absorbed the sting of our sin** and took the wrath, the devastation, caused to us.

Right before he died, Matthew tells us that Jesus utters two things from the cross: ⁴⁶ About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lema **sabachtháni?**" that is, "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?" He's been abandoned by God, in my place. What started in Gethsemane has been brought to completion.

And then, ⁵⁰ But Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and gave up his spirit. Luke tells us what he said here was, "It is finished."

⁶ Reworded for ease of readability. *The Crucifixion of Jesus*, Dr. Truman Davis

- Greek: *Tetelestai*, on tax receipts when the debt was paid.

⁵¹ Suddenly, the curtain of the sanctuary was torn in two from top to bottom, the earth quaked, and the rocks were split.

- This curtain was 4-inches thick, woven of 72 blue, red, purple cords. The curtain sealed off the people from the presence of God.
- It was called “the paroket,” which means literally “shut off,” because **that’s what the veil did**. It shut off the presence of God from everyone, on threat of death.⁷

Suddenly, as Jesus dies, this **4-inch thick curtain, the *paroket*, is split in two, showing** that through the torn body of Jesus the presence of God was now open to all.

He was cursed for you sin. He was humiliated in my place. Accused in my place. Condemned in my place. Defiled in my place. Beaten, abandoned, and killed in my place.

Lifted up was he to die, it is finished was his cry! Now in heaven exalted high, *Hallelujah, what a Savior!*

BTW: **What Jesus said on the cross as he died was the opposite** of what every other religious leader said when he died. For example, the Buddha’s last words were, “Strive without ceasing” Jesus says, “I did the striving for you.”

Salvation is the free gift to all who put their trust in Jesus. John 3:16—just believe! The gospel in four words: **Jesus in my place**. Jesus did not merely die for us; he died instead of us.

That’s what happened.

⁷ Menahem Haran, *Temples and Temple-Service in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 152–153. Maurice Henry Harris, *Hebraic Literature: Translations from the*

Now, not everyone saw it the same way, and Matthew gives us 4 characters in this story that give us glimpses into potential ways we can respond to the cross.

1. The Suffering Criminals, Who Rage Against God

Vs 38, which we skipped in the reading, tells us about two criminals: ~~³⁸ Then two criminals were crucified with him, one on the right and one on the left.~~ ³⁹ (They were) yelling insults at him, shaking their heads⁴⁰ 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!”

- (Now, **according to Luke**, one of these criminals eventually comes around and repents and asks Jesus to remember him when he came into his kingdom. **But at the beginning**, Matthew shows us that they are both insulting him.)
- These **criminals represent people who, in pain**, curse God for not delivering them. “If you really are who you say are, make this pain stop!”
 - **Think about it:** If you’re dying, **why bother expending energy insulting** an innocent man who is dying with you?
 - **Because when you are in pain**, nothing makes you madder than the idea of a God who could relieve that pain and doesn’t.
- **I want you to see in this every one of us has raged** against God in a moment of pain and say, “God, if you are, why don’t you fix this! Maybe you are not real after all.”

Now, like I said, **eventually, one of them came around** and what he said was so important, because it shows you what repentance looks like.

Talmud, Midrashim and Kabbala (M. Walter Dunne, 1901), 195–196. Psalm 97:2; Hebrews 10:20

- He says, “**The suffering that we are undergoing we deserve.** This man doesn’t deserve what is happening to him. He’s dying for us.”⁸
- **This is the confession of every person** who finds repentance and faith. “**We deserve our suffering, he didn’t!**”
 - **In saying that, I don’t mean** that you conclude that every moment of pain is in direct response to something that you’ve done—because that’s not true—but that you confess that ultimately, we live in a world filled with pain because we live in a world rightfully condemned because of our sin.
 - And **the only one who truly deserved to feel no pain**, Jesus, voluntarily entered it for us for no other reason than that he cared for us and wanted to save us.
- **You see, you have 2 choices** in pain and suffering:
 - **One: You conclude that your** pain means Jesus really is not who he says he is and lacks the power to save you. You say, “Jesus, if you’re really God, save yourself and save us.”
 - Or, **two:** You look at the cross and say, “Wow, he really does care. Look, he’s dying for me.”
 - **(Michael Green, Christian philosopher from Cambridge, says that the God of the gospel is the only God that doesn’t simply offer platitudes and perspective about pain, or say merely, “Here is an explanation for your pain.” He’s a God that came down and shared in the forsakenness that we feel in a universe gone wrong. He’s the only God that did that.**
 - And that means that **I may not understand everything that God is doing in my pain.** *[As an infinitely-wise God, I recognize that he has purposes for good that might go beyond my immediate ability to understand.]* But the cross shows me what my pain can’t mean. It can’t mean that God doesn’t care or has lost control...)

2. Creation Itself, Quaking Under the Weight of Glory Displayed

⁴⁵ From noon until three in the afternoon darkness came over the whole land.

- **Vs. 51 tells us this is accompanied by an earthquake.**
- It is as if **creation itself *has to respond*** to what it is seeing.
- **Something quakes when it encounters a force** they can’t withstand.
 - Think: if you were a **ladybug sitting on the floor** when a fully-grown man walked by, it would feel like the floor quaked. My weight on the floor makes it quake.
 - **If I were standing on a thin layer of ice** across the top of pond, the ice might begin to quake and crack under my weight. It’s in the presence of a weight it cannot support.
- **Here we have the creation itself unable to stay still** under the weight of glory being displayed.

I point this out to say that these things show us that the cross demands some kind of response from you.

- **You can’t look at these things and pass on by!** Was this true? Was God actually bearing the penalty for your sin? *This is not a historical curiosity.* According to this, **the God who created everything—you—bore your sin and died in your place! *Is this true?***
- And believer: Do you understand how insulting it is to God to sit in a place and hear about these things unmoved by them? To sing about them while barely moving our lips, hands in our pockets or holding a coffee cup, expressionless faces?
- These things **demand a response!** And what does it say to guests coming in when we respond this way?
- I love this one: ⁵² **The tombs were also opened and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised.** ⁵³ **And they came out of the tombs after his resurrection, entered the holy city, and appeared to many.**

⁸ Luke 23:40–41.

- Jesus's death was so amazing that some of the dead couldn't even control themselves—they leaped out the graves dancing and singing.
- **Shouldn't we, almost involuntarily,** leap and worship with joy?

3. The Outsiders, Who Recognize He Is Doing This for Them

In vs. 46, when Jesus called out “*Elí, Elí, lemá sabachtháni?*”⁴⁷ When some of those standing there heard this, they said, “He’s calling for Elijah.” (because *Elí* sounds like that). They are totally clueless! But⁵⁴ When the centurion and those with him, who were keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and the things that had happened, they were terrified and said, “Truly this man was the Son of God!”⁵⁵ Many women who had followed Jesus from Galilee and looked after him were there, watching from a distance.⁵

- **Why is it that the only people around the cross who “get”** what is happening are those whom the Jews considered “outsiders” or 2nd rate: Gentile soldiers and women?
- **The disciples** don't get it. **The chief priests** don't get it—but **the Roman soldiers** recite the 1st part of the Nicene Creed and the women refuse to leave! Why?
- BECAUSE the **gospel can only be seen from a posture of humility**, and the weakened, those who recognize their need of Jesus, are more likely to perceive him and lean into his grace than the proud who feel no need.
 - **Kharis at 3 years old, always seeing the planes...** It's because she is always looking up! The proud can never see God because they are always looking down and so unaware of what is above them. The humble are always looking up so they see God.
 - **Grace only flows downhill!**
- Religious people, especially ones in positions of power, like the chief priests, are often the ones most blind to the gospel's teaching of forgiveness.

- If you are **rich, or powerful, or you grew up religious**—beware: you might assent to the truths about Jesus but your soul may never have really been gripped by your true need for grace.
- **Easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone rich**—in power, money, or religiosity—to enter heaven.

One more... 4. Simon of Cyrene, Who Helps Carry the Cross

I want to end our time by **returning to Simon**, the man forced to carry Jesus's cross.

You know, this was a terrible event to have been present for, **but if you had to be there**, this is the role you'd want to play, right? **To help Jesus carry his cross?**

I think Matthew puts this picture in there because he wants to give us a picture of what the **early church, Jesus's followers, are going to do. We are going to** willingly pick up Jesus's cross and help him carry it.

You see, **it's true, in one sense, that Jesus's work is finished. BUT** not everyone has heard about it, and like Martin Luther famously said, “It wouldn't matter if Jesus died 1000x if no one ever heard about it!”

And the only way they can hear about it is if we preach it to them, and the only way we can preach it to them if we embrace **the sacrifices required to get it to them.**

- **FOR EXAMPLE, you carry the cross** when you commit to leaving your home to take the gospel to a people overseas—you do that not because you enjoy living 7K miles away from home, or want to live far from your parents, but because they need to hear!
- Or right here in our own community, who have never heard it. And you embrace the uncomfortable sacrifice so they can hear. **So**

sick of hearing people get out of ministry because they are not fulfilled. Was this fulfilling to Jesus?

- You carry the cross when you take the step of reaching out to someone, and braving through the awkwardness, of telling them about Jesus.
- You carry the cross when you willingly undergo a sacrifice so that other people can hear.
- You carry the cross when you forgive someone and let them taste of the grace that you have received:
 - This week my family and I **saw the movie, “I Can Only Imagine.”** It tells the story behind the song, “I Can Only Imagine,” one of the most popular Christian songs of all time. **Bart Millard**, the writer of the song and lead singer of Mercy Me, wrote it after his dad had died. His dad had been extremely abusive throughout his life, driving him away. A couple of years ago Bart sang this before the President and members of Congress at the National Prayer Breakfast, and he explained that in the year before his dad died they had been reconciled to each other because of the power of the gospel in his dad’s life. He said that he knew the gospel was true because it had the power to do things he would never have thought possible: first, to change his dad from an abusive alcoholic into the dad that he had always wanted; and second, to give him the power to forgive. He explained that after he learned what God had forgiven him, he developed the ability to forgive his dad.

The **crucified Savior has released greater power** in the world than all the armies on earth could ever amass. Are we willing to pick up the cross so that others can experience it?

Which brings me to where I started this message: *Are you ready to be baptized?*

- You see, the **first identification you make with Christ’s cross** happens through baptism. That’s where you say, “I’m not ashamed to identify with you.”
 - **We read this story and think**, “I would want to be Simon. I would carry the cross?”
 - The first place you pick it up is in baptism... **BAPTISM is an even clearer identification with the cross** than what Simon did, because **Paul** said that is what the whole thing is literally about:
 - **Romans 6:3–4**. Buried with baptism. You are grabbing the cross and saying, “I am not ashamed.”
 - **I am not ashamed of cross, and I’ll gladly pick it up!**

Are you ready to do that? I want to give you a chance to do that today if you never have.

Like I said, **Baptism is the first act of obedience** whereby we declare that we have become followers of Jesus. It’s what he commanded. It is the public ceremony whereby we claim Jesus before others.

Many people here have reasons they haven’t done this:

- **“It’s inconvenient. Get wet? Feels awkward...”** *Really? Have you not been paying attention at all?* After what we’ve seen Jesus go through for us today, you won’t obey him in this? Can you really say you are serious about Jesus if you want even take this 1st, easy step?
- **“No clothes for baptism”**
- **“I was baptized as a baby”** and don’t want to insult my parents— **but how were you choosing to identify with his death at this point?** This ring I put on wouldn’t mean anything to my wife if it had been put there at my birth... but I choose to wear it! In fact, I got it tattooed to me!
- **“Not sure when I was saved...”** Me neither. That’s fine. This is the ceremony whereby you make this certain.

- **“I have questions. Not sure if I’m ready.”** Great. All we want to do is start a conversation and help you get them answer. Stepping forward is not a commitment to be baptized, just to have a conversation, and if at any point we, or you, feel like we’re not ready yet, and we’ll press pause to take the time to make sure you’re ready to do this, with no pressure.

OK? This is serious. A bunch of you are about to say, “I am not ashamed to declare I’m going ‘all-in’ with Jesus.”

- Like XXXXXX,
- Are you ready to take that step?

MUSIC: I’m going to ASK OUR COUNSELORS to go ahead and get into position, right now, and I’m going to pray... and give you a chance to ask God for the strength. Then we’ll stand and at all campuses, you’ll come.

Heads bowed

- Pray to receive Christ
- Ask God for strength to obey
- If you prayed to receive Christ, raise your hand; if you need to be baptized, raise your hand...

If you raised your hand, ask someone close to you—heart is beating fast, family, or friend member, to come with you. If you are sitting next to someone and you think they raised their hand, or you were peaking, tap them and say, “I’ll go with you.” In fact, everybody turn to your neighbor right now and say, “I’ll go with you if you want.”
(And you need to come, you kind of nod back)

Not a good time to go to the bathroom!

The time for excuses is over; the time for obedience is at hand!

OK, on 3, stand and step... and Summit, let’s celebrate....

