

Intro

We're at the crucifixion. On Sunday (Palm Sunday) Jesus triumphantly approached Jerusalem on a donkey. With crowds going before and after him, calling out "*Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!*" (Matt 21:9). In other words, celebrating the Messiah's arrival.

During Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday Jesus cleared the temple, healed many, engaged the religious establishment, and instructed his disciples.

On Thursday Jesus celebrated Passover with the Last Supper. As Thursday wound down (the Jewish day begins at sundown not midnight) Jesus brought his disciples to Gethsemane. Judas betrayed Jesus by revealing his location to the Sanhedrin. Overnight and into the morning a trial ensued, culminating in Barabbas released and Jesus sentenced to crucifixion.

It's sometime around 8am when our passage begins (Mark 15:25 says Jesus was crucified at 9am). This morning we learn that:

BIG IDEA: Jesus suffered.

READ PASSAGE

PRAY

Body

Passage Focus

Matthew details the physical suffering and verbal mockery of Jesus. No explanation of purpose. No commands. No promises. No threats. No encouragements. No rebukes. No application. Just the details.

4 things we learn from the crucifixion...

Point 1: Jesus suffered physically

Scourging (27:26)

Last week I skipped over the fact that Jesus was scourged (27:26). If you saw *The Passion of the Christ* you have a good idea.

- 1) More than just being whipped.
- 2) So serious a punishment Roman citizens could only be scourged with the direct edict of Caesar.
- 3) Required legally before execution.
- 4) Put the prisoner in a weakened state before crucifixion. (too weak to resist?)
- 5) Sometimes deadly.
- 6) Prisoner was tied to a post or forced to the ground.
- 7) Back was exposed (likely stripped down to a loin cloth).
- 8) Conducted with a leather whip containing pieces of bone and metal.
- 9) Severe pain because it ripped the flesh.
- 10) Could expose bone and the intestines.
- 11) Resulted in a loss of blood.

12) Jesus' scourging had to be controlled enough to ensure he was alive to be crucified.

A crown and a reed (27:29-30)

After scourging, Jesus was taken by Pilate's soldiers to Pilate's headquarters in Jerusalem (27:27).

Crown of thorns:

- 1) A plant with thorns that stick into the flesh.
- 2) Maybe a thorn bush or date palm which had thorns as long as 12 inches.
- 3) Mockery was the intent (a king's crown), but the thorns were painful.

Reed:

- 1) Mimicked the emperor's royal scepter.
- 2) A heavy piece of plant stalk, maybe bamboo?
- 3) The Greek verb tense suggests repeated striking = a heavy or strong reed.

Traveling

Simon of Cyrene was forced to carry Jesus' cross (27:32) because Jesus was too weak from the scourging. Serious pain and loss of blood at this point. A random guy walking down the road.

Golgotha:

Crucified at Golgotha. Had to be a major roadway per 27:39. A place with good foot traffic to glorify Roman domination and shame the victim. Outside the city walls of Jerusalem. Depending on the location of the governor's headquarters and Golgotha, likely less than half a mile walk to crucifixion site.

Wine mixed with gall:

Either a narcotic offered to dull the pain or a bitter, undrinkable beverage offered in spite. If a narcotic, Jesus refused because his mission was to drink the full cup of divine wrath, not to minimize suffering.

Crucifixion

- 1) Crucifixion stems from Rome's desire to express its dominance over conquered peoples.

This is what happens when you defy the Empire.

Ancient Near Eastern peoples used to publicly display the corpses of conquered foes on spikes.

- 2) Reserved for the worst criminals and lowest classes like slaves, notorious criminals, insurrectionists.
- 3) Like scourging, Roman citizens could only be crucified with the direct edict of Caesar.
- 4) Crucifixion was cruel and degrading, the ultimate form of public shame, an event that aroused horror.

Designed to maximize suffering and shame. And call attention to Rome's superiority.

- 5) The Sanhedrin called for Jesus' crucifixion to maximize public contempt for Jesus.

In the Jewish understanding, being publicly hung on a tree confirmed suspicions that Jesus was cursed by God.

"And if a man has committed a crime punishable by death and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, ²³ his body shall not remain all night on the tree, but you shall bury him the same day, for a hanged man is cursed by God. You shall not defile your land that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance." – Deuteronomy 21:22-23

Who's going to follow this guy if he's cursed by God?

- 6) Before the act of crucifixion, victims were scourged and forced to carry their cross.

Preliminary suffering and shaming before the crucifixion proper.

- 7) Victims were stripped naked (maybe to a loin cloth) at the crucifixion site.

More public shame.

- 8) Crucifixion was awful because death was slow and the pain was excruciating.
- 9) Slow because no vital organs were affected.
- 10) Death came by suffocation or heart attack or blood loss.
- 11) In Jesus' case, his ankles were nailed to the vertical post and his wrists were nailed to the horizontal beam.

In John 20:25, the resurrected Jesus had nail marks in Jesus' hands. The wrist was considered part of the hand. If nailed in the middle of the hand, it would tear under the weight of hanging on the cross.

- 12) Nails were used to inflict pain and made Jesus susceptible to death by loss of blood.

- 13) Suffocation was also a factor.

Why the difficulty breathing? When we exhale our diaphragm rises up. Being hung, Jesus' weight pulls down on the diaphragm preventing him from exhaling. Difficulty breathing was corrected by using the feet to push up and take weight off of the arms. Given the nails this was a painful process. To maintain his breathing Jesus would alternate between pushing with his feet and slumping. Alternating between pain in the wrist or ankles. Eventually the victim became too weak to support their weight and breathing would cease. If not already dead by the blood loss or shock from the physical pain.

Application

Horrific physical suffering. Jesus willingly embraced torture.

Point 2: Jesus suffered verbal mockery

There's four accounts of Jesus being mocked here.

The governor's headquarters (27:27-31)

Stripped naked or down to a loin cloth. Given a scarlet robe to signify royalty. Crown and scepter to signify royalty.

"Hail, King of the Jews!" – 27:30

Kneeling before him in sarcastic mockery. Spit on. A joke to be laughed at. A worthless criminal to torture. Clothed again for travel to the crucifixion site (27:31).

Those who passed by (27:39-40)

Crucifixions took place in areas with high traffic to maximize shame.

"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." – 27:40

This must have included people who witnessed the overnight trial because they knew the charge. They didn't believe he could come down from the cross. If they did, they wouldn't be mocking him.

The Sanhedrin (27:41-43)

Chief priests (mostly Sadducees), scribes (mostly Pharisees), and elders (27:41).

"He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. ⁴³ He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him. For he said, 'I am the Son of God.'" – 27:42-43

Saved others = healings, demons cast out, even raised the dead. Ironically, he was able to do mighty works, works done in public for all to see, yet he can't escape the cross? The Sanhedrin should have been troubled. If he was able to do miracles, what might he do to us? They should have believed he had the ability to come down. They should have been scared but they were blind!

They force Jesus to act on their terms. We'll believe if you save yourself. They didn't believe. If they did they wouldn't be treating Jesus with contempt. They're confident he won't act.

The two robbers (27:38, 44)

The two robbers said much the same. Mocked by even the dregs of society. From Luke 21:39-43 we learn that one of the robbers came to faith.

Application

Mocked for his titles and his sovereignty. If they only knew who they were talking to. Jesus had the ability to act. He willingly chose to not assert himself because he was determined to complete his mission. Ironically, in their mockery, these four groups testified to the truth. He was King. He was the Son of God.

How hard is it to take it when we have answers? Jesus took it. Jesus had answers.

Point 3: Jesus suffered because God hates sin

Explanation

for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. – Matthew 26:28

Jesus had to die in order for sins to be forgiven. One of the blessings of the New Covenant is, *"I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more"* (Jeremiah 31:34). No blood shed = no new covenant = no sins forgiven.

In Exodus God speaks of himself as merciful to sinners, but he won't clear the guilty.

"The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, ⁷ keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation." – Exodus 34:6-7

God is merciful and forgives sin, yet he never fails to punish sin. How is this?

for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵ whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. ²⁶ It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. – Romans 3:23-26

Several things going on here:

- 1) All sin
- 2) God passes over sin
- 3) God is just
- 4) How can this be?
- 5) Sin propitiated by Christ's death

That word propitiation in 3:25 speaks to the fact that God's wrath against our sin has to be appeased. Every sin ever committed must be punished. Because God is good he can't overlook sin. On the cross, Jesus satisfied the Father's wrath for the sins of all those who will ever believe. Others will persist in rebellion, in which case God's wrath against their sins will be appeased in hell. If we believe, Jesus stands before the Father as our substitute. Wrath averted.

Illustration

Think of God kind of like a judge with conviction and character. What does a good judge do? They uphold the law. They care about the common good. They don't clear the guilty. They punish the guilty. They enforce justice. To overlook crimes would be to pervert justice. God doesn't pervert justice. God cares about the common good. Because of who he is, he can't overlook physical abuse or fraud or disrespectful children or arrogance or hatred. He can't overlook what conflicts with his character.

Forgiveness is received through faith in Jesus alone. Trusting in the merits of Jesus' death not ourselves. Not trying to appease God by good deeds. Turning from rebellion to trust in Jesus. Through faith the benefits of Christ's death are transferred to us. And we escape the judgment we deserve.

Application

God opposes sin so strongly that every sin ever committed must be punished. That's why hell exists. That's why Jesus went to the cross. Serious about sin yet merciful.

We image God by opposing sin. In our hearts, in our habits, in the church, in society. We also image God by extending mercy to sinners and pointing them to Christ, the only way to be rescued from the penalty our sin deserves. And by extending mercy to one another in this local church.

Point 4: Jesus suffered because God loves us

Explanation

If the crucifixion, and all it entailed, was the price necessary for our forgiveness and rescue from hell, Jesus must care for us. Jesus must have affection for us. Jesus must value us. Jesus must enjoy relationship with us. Jesus must enjoy rescuing us. Jesus must enjoy extending mercy to the guilty. Jesus must look forward to being personally present with us in the new heavens and new earth. God must be generous. He gave his Son!

God cares about us even when we have cancer or lose a spouse or experience financial hardship. How do we know? The cross. Jesus suffered so we wouldn't have to. When life is hard and we don't know the why let's focus on what we do know. God cares deeply for us.

And God loves that believer sitting next to you. He died in their place. How should God's love for his people guide our treatment of each other?

What keeps me going when life is hard and frustrating, when things didn't go as I expected, when I can't understand why? I remember that God cares for me. The cross is my proof. Jesus values me regardless of my circumstances.

Non-Christian

Do you want to follow a God, a Savior, who dies for his people?

If you wouldn't consider yourself a Christian. You wouldn't say I've repented and my sins and trusted Jesus for forgiveness. The Bible says you're God's enemy, cut off from God's steadfast love, under wrath, and in need of reconciliation and rescue.

This was me. I had to approach Jesus for forgiveness. Turn from rebellion to trust. The cross reveals how seriously God takes sin. But the good news is that God takes pleasure in showing mercy to the guilty. That's why Jesus was crucified.

Conclusion

4 things we learn from the crucifixion...

First, Jesus suffered physically. The price of mercy.

Second, Jesus suffered verbal mockery. The price of mercy.

Third, Jesus suffered because God hates sin. God loves justice.

Fourth, Jesus suffered because God loves us. God delights in rescuing sinners.