**THE CRUCIFIXION OF THE KING**

April 14, 2019

Matthew 27:1-56

Key verse Matthew 27:46 “About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, ‘*Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?’* (which means ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’)”

The heroes of our society are the people who take matters in their own hands and kill the bad guys. We are tired of being harassed. We are tired of being intimidated. We are tired of being bullied. We are tired of our own powerlessness. So people are frustrated, fearful and angry. So our heroes are people who fight back. So Jesus wouldn’t be much of a hero today. He did the opposite of fighting back; He gave his life for the very people who were taking it, and then he forgave them, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” Last Sunday, one person insulted me and challenged my leadership. I was so angry that I could not sleep at all on Sunday night. I tried to devise a way to get revenge on him. But then I remembered Jesus Christ who did not retaliate on the cross, but trusted God. 1 Peter 2:23 says, “When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.” Let’s think about Jesus who did not retaliate on his enemies, but gave his life on the cross. Let’s think about Jesus who was forsaken by God so that we may be forgiven. Let’s think about Jesus was condemned on the cross so that we may be accepted.

**First**, Jesus was tried before Pilate. It was early in the morning on Friday of the passion week.

The Jewish religious leaders had already decided through their overnight meeting to put Jesus to death. But they had no authority to pronounce a death sentence on criminals (Jn 18:31). So they bound him and handed him over to Pilate. Judas Iscariot had not imagined that the religious leaders would kill Jesus. When Judas saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse. He regretted what he had done and wanted to undo it. So he returned the thirty silver coins to the chief priests and the elders. “I have sinned,” he said, “for I have betrayed innocent blood” (3,4a). What was their response? “‘What is that to us? That’s your responsibility’” (4b). Judas took the money back to the religious leaders in order to escape his guilty feelings. But it didn't work as he had wished. So Judas threw the money into the temple and left. Finally, he hanged himself. He felt remorse, but he did not remember Jesus’ word and did not repent. The chief priests picked up the coins and said, “It is against the law to put this into the treasury, since it is blood money” (6). So they decided to buy the potter’s field as a burial place for foreigners (7). They valued petty regulations regarding ritual purity more than their responsibility to human life. How could such respected people become so heartless and wicked? But actually, we often act in the same way. We can easily become self-deceptive, thinking that we are serving God when we are actually following our hidden agenda. God looks into our hearts. When our hearts are controlled by jealousy, pride and hypocrisy, we participate in killing Jesus. It is the chain of our sins of self-interest that condemned Jesus. But still, God is in control. Matthew testifies that what was spoken in Scripture was fulfilled (9-10). God never fails despite sinners’ evil schemes.

Look at verse 11. Pilate the governor asked Jesus, “Are you the King of the Jews?” (11) Pilate’s concern was whether Jesus was a threat to Rome. If Jesus claimed to be a king, it would be a blatant challenge to Caesar, which would be considered a capital crime. To Pilate’s question, Jesus answered, “You have said so.” Jesus was saying that he is the King of the Jews, but not a worldly king that Pilate feared (cf. Jn 18:36-37). Then, the accusations rained down hot and heavy from the high priests and religious leaders (12; MSG). Everybody knows what it feels like to be accused wrongly. When people blame us for what we haven’t done, we immediately enter a defensive mode and want to lash out on the false accuser. But Jesus said nothing. In Pilate’s job career, all accused people did their best to defend themselves. But Jesus was silent. By Roman law, a defendant who didn’t defend himself was regarded guilty. Still, Pilate was convinced that Jesus was innocent, but he didn’t release Jesus because he feared people. Instead, he resorted to the governor’s custom to release one prisoner chosen by the crowd. Pilate asked the crowd to choose between Barabbas—a notorious prisoner--and Jesus, hoping to make use of that custom to set Jesus free. But it didn’t work. The chief priests stirred up the crowd, and the mob became irrational. They chose Barabbas. In his helplessness, Pilate asked, “What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called the Messiah?” They all shouted, “Crucify him!” (22) He was ensnared in the web of his own indecisiveness, and became a victim of public opinion.

**Second**, the King was crucified in our place. After the sentence, Jesus was flogged (26). Roman flogging was horribly cruel. It employed a metal-tipped whip. It tore through the skin and tissues of Jesus. Since flogging often exposed bones and intestines, many prisoners died from such flogging. After flogging, the governor’s soldiers took Jesus and started playing cruel games, ridiculing Jesus’ kingship. They put a scarlet robe on Jesus. They twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head, as a mock crown. They put a stick in his right hand to look like a king's scepter. Then, kneeling before him, the soldiers mockingly shouted, “Hail, king of the Jews!” Then they directly insulted him: They spit in his face and beat him on the head with the stick again and again. What a cruel and merciless game! They were indulging in sadistic pleasure. What they admired was a powerful conqueror, not a defeated king. They were blind to see what kind of king Jesus was. Do we have eyes to see this humble King Jesus? Jesus “had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him” (Isa 53:2). Our pride and self-centered view despises and rejects him when we aspire for power and worldly success. Why did Jesus endure all of this? Jesus was willing to endure this mockery because of his love for us. Isaiah 53:4 says, “Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering.” After mocking Jesus, the soldiers led him away to crucify him. Along the way, they met a man from Cyrene named Simon and forced him carry Jesus’ cross (32). Jesus was too injured and weak from his flogging to bear the cross all the way.

The execution place was beside a well-traveled road by Golgotha, where people going in and out of Jerusalem could see the execution of criminals. Matthew briefly writes, “they crucified him.” Crucifixion was certainly one of the most horrifying forms of torture and execution that people have ever invented. It stood for torture, shame, death, and defeat. Jesus’ hands were nailed at the wrists to either end of the crossbeam; his feet were nailed together at his ankles to the vertical beam. Jesus had to lift his head far enough off his chest to gasp for air. Every breath he took caused excruciating pain.

Verse 37 says, “Above his head they placed the written charge against him: THIS IS JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS.” From a Roman perspective, Jesus was a political rebel, worthy of a capital crime. Matthew both in his opening (Mt 1-4) and closing (Mt 26-28) chapters emphasized that Jesus is the King of the Jews, which is the Messianic title. It is the greatest irony that the King of kings was crucified. Jesus deserved the worship of all creation, but he hung on the shameful cross, naked and beaten. What an injustice in the cruelest form! This was happening publicly in daylight. Jesus was crucified between two criminals (38); one on his right and one on his left, looking like a king with his advisors on both sides. As Prophet Isaiah prophesied, “his [Jesus’] appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any human being and his form marred beyond human likeness” (Isa 52:14).

People who passed by hurled insults at him, “Save yourself! Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!” (39) The religious leaders also mocked Jesus, “He saved others, but he can’t save himself! He’s the king of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him.” (42). Even the two criminals next to Jesus joined in the mocking (44). The insults came from every side. The whole world was shouting the same message to Jesus: “Save yourself if you are the Son of God.” This was Satan’s greatest temptation for Jesus to save himself and come down from the cross (cf. Mt 4:3). It is the way of our fallen world. The world only wants a king for self-serving purposes — a worldly king who builds a kingdom by destroying all his enemies. As people try to save their own lives, they desire to build their own glorious kingdom. Fundamentally, the whole world rejected and crucified Jesus, their king. This was done not by barbarians, but by pinnacles of human civilization. The scandal is that the Son of God was executed in shame and powerlessness. After all, who would choose to stay on the cross despite excruciating suffering and shame? But Jesus chose to do so. Jesus, the Son of God, didn’t exercise his power to save himself. Why? He did this for the sake of our eternal salvation. Jesus is a king who died for his rebellious enemies like me. How much Jesus wanted to come down and crushed the sinners! How much Jesus wanted to prove that he was the Son of God! They said that they would believe if he came down. But we believe because he stayed up. One commentator says, “It was the power of love, not nails, that kept him there” (Mounce). How can it be that the King of creation died for me? How great is God’s amazing love! The crucified Christ challenges every human being to tear down our wrong ideas about God and ourselves. Jesus challenges us to turn away from the idols of this world and to radically turn to the living God.

**Third**, the King was forsaken in our place. Look at verse 45. “From noon until three in the afternoon darkness came over all the land.” Unusual darkness appeared. In the Bible, “darkness” symbolizes mainly the time of God’s judgment. Here, darkness indicates God’s wrath and judgment on the sins of the world. Look at verse 46: “About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, ‘Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?’ (which means ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’).” For six long hours He had been enduring immeasurable agony. But far more than that physical and emotional trauma was the spiritual pain of feeling God’s furious anger over sin poured out totally on Him. It was as if God accumulated all of his anger against all of the sins of all of the ages and poured it all out on Christ. But as that sin-bearing judgment comes to a climax, he gathers his strength enough to cry out from his heart. He cries out about a profound sense of alienation from God, of separation from God too deep for us to understand. “Eli, Eli,” is the Hebrew for “My God, My God.” Mark’s Gospel says, “Eloi, Eloi,” in Aramaic.

Did Jesus cease to have fellowship with God? Yes. Did He get cut off from the communion with God? Yes. Did he die physically? Yes. Did he die spiritually? Yes. He was separated from the fellowship of the Father. When he cries out to God about the separation, that’s cause for the crowd to mock him. They laughed at that. They knew perfectly well what he said. They know the difference between Eli and Elijah. But notice what their response was in verse 47, “Some of those who were standing there, when they heard it, began saying, ‘He’s calling for Elijah.’” This was their malicious sarcasm, because Elijah was believed to be the deliverer and the forerunner of Messiah, and the one who would announce Messiah’s work.

Jesus’ cross reveals that God is infinitely holy. The Bible teaches that God takes our sins seriously. God is provoked to holy anger over his people by their sin. Though God loves all sinners, he is a burning and consuming fire against our sins. Think about people’s heinous sins involved in Jesus’ cross. Sinners deserve condemnation and death. At the same time, Jesus’ cross reveals that God is infinitely compassionate and loving. How then did God express his holiness without consuming us and express his love without condoning our sins? In his infinite mercy and justice, God in Christ took our place. At the cross, Jesus bore our sins (Mt 1:21; 20:28; 26:28). 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become righteousness of God.” Jesus drank the cup of God’s wrath on our sins. He took our deserved separation from God upon himself.

Look at verse 51. “At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.” The curtain that separated the Most Holy Place from the rest of the temple was 60 feet high and 30 feet wide. By the tearing of this curtain, God himself abolished the separation. Through the sacrifice of Jesus, the new and living way is open for all people to enter into God’s presence (Heb 10:20). Jesus who sacrificed his life is now the new temple. In Jesus, we can come into God’s holy and gracious presence (Heb 4:16). The separation from God is removed forever. Are you struggling with your sins and weaknesses? Come to Jesus, our merciful high priest. He accepts you as you are when you surrender to him as you are. In Jesus, you are accepted because he was condemned! In Jesus, you are forgiven because he was forsaken!

It is unthinkable that our King was crucified in our place. 1 Peter 2:24 says, “He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness: by his wounds you have been healed.” May God bless you to receive healing through his wounds. May God help you to fix your eyes on Jesus in your pain and suffering.