

²⁷ Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole garrison around Him. ²⁸ And they stripped Him and put a scarlet robe on Him. ²⁹ When they had twisted a crown of thorns, they put *it* on His head, and a reed in His right hand. And they bowed the knee before Him and mocked Him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" ³⁰ Then they spat on Him, and took the reed and struck Him on the head. ³¹ And when they had mocked Him, they took the robe off Him, put His *own* clothes on Him, and led Him away to be crucified. ³² Now as they came out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name. Him they compelled to bear His cross. ³³ And when they had come to a place called Golgotha, that is to say, Place of a Skull, ³⁴ they gave Him sour wine mingled with gall to drink. But when He had tasted *it*, He would not drink. ³⁵ Then they crucified Him, and divided His garments, casting lots, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet: "They divided My garments among them, And for My clothing they cast lots." ³⁶ Sitting down, they kept watch over Him there. ³⁷ And they put up over His head the accusation written against Him: ³⁸ Then two robbers were crucified with Him, one on the right and another on the left. ³⁹ And those who passed by blasphemed Him, wagging their heads ⁴⁰ and saying, "You who destroy the temple and build *it* in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross." ⁴¹ Likewise the chief priests also, mocking with the scribes and elders, said, ⁴² "He saved others; Himself He cannot save. If He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him. ⁴³ He trusted in God; let Him deliver Him now if He will have Him; for He said, 'I am the Son of God.'" ⁴⁴ Even the robbers who were crucified with Him reviled Him with the same thing. ⁴⁵ Now from the sixth hour until the ninth hour there was darkness over all the land. ⁴⁶ And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" that is, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" ⁴⁷ Some of those who stood there, when they heard *that*, said, "This Man is calling for Elijah!" ⁴⁸ Immediately one of them ran and took a sponge, filled *it* with sour wine and put *it* on a reed, and offered it to Him to drink. ⁴⁹ The rest said, "Let Him alone; let us see if Elijah will come to save Him." ⁵⁰ And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit. ⁵¹ Then, behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth quaked, and the rocks were split, ⁵² and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; ⁵³ and coming out of the graves after His resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many. ⁵⁴ So when the centurion and those with him, who were guarding Jesus, saw the earthquake and the things that had happened, they feared greatly, saying, "Truly this was the Son of God!" ⁵⁵ And many women who followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to Him, were there looking on from afar, ⁵⁶ among whom were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of Zebedee's sons.

Introduction

We are now about to enter the fifth message about Matthew's teaching on the message of Easter. If you have been attending over the last 4 weeks you will know that we have been working through Matthew's account of the Easter Story.

He has given us a very detailed and careful account of the events leading up to the death of Jesus. Matthew's Gospel was written primarily with the Jewish people in mind and this is the reason that his account has been so extensive.

We can divide our text into two sections.

The first part deals with the responses of people to the crucifixion of Jesus, that is v. 27-44.

The second part deals with God's commentary on the cross, that is v. 45-56.

1. Responses of people to the crucifixion – v. 27-44.

Matthew records the responses of various people who behaved in very negative ways towards Jesus at His crucifixion.

The first group of people were the Roman Soldiers.

a) **Roman Soldiers** - In v. 27-37 Matthew records how the Roman Soldiers treated Jesus.

We are told in v.27 that the Roman Soldiers who were ordered to arrange the crucifixion decided to make a public show of their abuse of Jesus.

They gathered the whole garrison around to watch their evil behaviour.

A Roman garrison was about 6000 soldiers, so it was quite large number of people to assemble for the show.

We are told that they stripped Jesus naked and then put a scarlet robe on Him.

It is likely that the nearest colour that the soldiers could find for a Royal Robe was their night time cloaks.

These were cloaks that soldiers used to wear in cold winter nights.

Jesus claimed to be the “King of the Jews” and the soldiers were about to make a mockery of this title, starting first with the “Royal Robe”.

The next thing that the soldiers did was to twist a crown of thorns and put it on His head. This obviously caused bleeding to the head of Jesus.

The purpose of the crown of thorns was to mimic the wreath worn by Caesar on official occasions.

They placed a “Reed” in His right hand.

This Reed was meant to represent royalty.

It was given to Jesus to mock His claim to be the King of the Jews.

The Soldiers then mocked Jesus, shouting out, “Hail King of the Jews”.

Then the soldiers spat on Jesus, took the reed and struck Him on the head.

The final thing was to mock Jesus again, remove the robe and then replace Jesus’s own clothes.

The show was over, the soldiers had finished their fun, and now Jesus was taken away to be crucified.

On route to the place where Jesus was to be crucified they found a man called Simon from Cyrene, the soldiers compelled him to carry the cross that Jesus would be nailed upon shortly.

Normally people had to carry their own cross, but Jesus was so beaten up and weak that He couldn’t manage this task.

The soldiers gave Jesus sour wine mingled with gall to drink.

This drink was designed not to soften the pain, it was designed to try and stop the victim from struggling when he was nailed to the cross.

Jesus refused this drink.

In v. 35 Matthew tells us that the soldiers cast lots for Jesus’s clothing. By now Jesus was naked and nailed to the cross.

So what can we learn from the horrible way in which Jesus was treated by the Roman Soldiers?

1. **God knew in advance all that was going to happen to Jesus on this awful day.**

Turn with me to Psalm 22.

Psalm 22: v.18.

¹⁸ They divide My garments among them, And for My clothing they cast lots.

About 800 years before this event, God spoke through His servant David about awful suffering of Jesus on the cross.

Psalm 22: v. 14-18.

¹⁴ I am poured out like water,
And all My bones are out of joint;
My heart is like wax;
It has melted within Me.

¹⁵ My strength is dried up like a potsherd,
And My tongue clings to My jaws;
You have brought Me to the dust of death.

¹⁶ For dogs have surrounded Me;
The congregation of the wicked has enclosed Me.
They pierced My hands and My feet;

¹⁷ I can count all My bones.
They look *and* stare at Me.
¹⁸ They divide My garments among them,
And for My clothing they cast lots.

Knowing that God knew in advance about the way in which Jesus would be treated by these soldiers didn't make the experience any easier.

However, it does teach us that even in the very difficult times of life, God has a plan.

This plan is known by God and He allows it for His sovereign purposes.

In other words, God is going to achieve something far greater in His purposes.

The difficult experiences are necessary in our lives to fulfil those purposes.

We all want the blessing of the forgiveness of our sins and a home in Heaven, but the cost of that blessing came at a high price in the purposes of God.

We will hear more of that cost later.

2. The Soldiers were ignorant of who Jesus really was.

Although the soldiers were ordered to perform the crucifixion of Jesus, they had no choice, they went beyond what they had to do in order to mock Jesus.

The soldiers displayed their own personal wickedness in all the things that they did to Jesus. From historical records we do know that the soldiers were not Jewish conscripts. They were likely to have been Syrians, who spoke Aramaic which was the most common conversational and trade language of Palestine.

It is unlikely that the soldiers knew very much about Jesus.

However, one thing for sure and that was, that God knew the sinfulness of the Roman Soldier's hearts.

Also God knows the sinfulness of our hearts.

What we don't realise until we become Christians is that ALL sin is against God.

In Psalm 51 which is David's repentant prayer after he committed adultery, he says in v. 4

"Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in your sight."

David acknowledged that his sin was like the soldiers who abused Jesus.

It is very difficult to understand that the sins that we commit offend a Holy God, but is a truth from God's word.

The soldiers were ignorant who Jesus really was.

He was God's Son, or God in human form.

It should be different for Christians. We know who Jesus is personally.

Therefore, we should be much more sensitive to sin in our lives.

The closer we get to Jesus in our personal relationship, the more that we are aware of our sinful nature.

May the Holy Spirit help us not to abuse Jesus through our behaviour.

- b) **The Passers By – v. 39-40** - Matthew introduces us to the second lot of people and their response to Jesus on the cross.

These people who passed by were challenging Jesus to prove Himself by coming down from the cross.

(v. 40)

⁴⁰ and saying, "You who destroy the temple and build *it* in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross."

The crowd of people passing by was probably composed of Jewish Pilgrims who had come to celebrate the "Passover".

Jerusalem was so busy during Passover time that many people had to camp outside the city or stay in nearby towns.

No doubt this group of people knew about Jesus.

They had either heard of his miracles or even seen some being performed. Some of them may even have been the crowd during one of his teaching messages.

They also could have been part of the crowd on Palm Sunday when Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey and the streets were lined with people cheering.

These people were very fickle, they wanted to know Jesus when they had needs that needed to be satisfied.

However now their hurled abuse at Jesus, mocking Him and taunting Him to leave the cross to prove His deity.

Today the world is full of people like this.

Once they attended Church.

Once they may have even professed faith in Jesus, but now they are "Passers-By"

They no longer attend Church and no longer profess faith in Jesus.

Jesus doesn't meet their needs any more.

My only comment is that Jesus is here for us, to deal with our sin problem.

If we really understand what that is all about, and we come humbly to Jesus to ask for the forgiveness of our sins, then we will never be one of the "Passers-By".

We will want to stay and appreciate Jesus for who He is and what He has done for us.

- c) **Chief Priests, Scribes, and Elders -v. 41-43.** These were the religious leaders of the day. These people behaved in a similar way to the "Passers-By".

verse 42-43 in the N.K.J. version.

⁴² "He saved others; Himself He cannot save. If He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him. ⁴³ He trusted in God; let Him deliver Him now if He will have Him; for He said, 'I am the Son of God.'"

It is rather sad that the Religious leaders behaved in this way towards Jesus.

However, it was not unexpected because these people broke all the Jewish Rules in order to get Jesus to this point.

They had orchestrated an illegal and unjust trial with false witnesses.

If Jesus had come down from the cross, they still would not have believed in Him.

The Religious people wanted Jesus to fit into their plan and purposes, not to fit into God's plan and purposes.

Their God was their religion and their relationship with that God was based upon rules and not upon a relationship of "Grace" based upon Jesus.

There are still many religious people today who think and act the same way as these people of that time.

- d) **The Robbers insulted Jesus** - v. 44. - In v. 44 we are told that the criminals who hung on the cross next to Jesus also abused Him.

The Greek word that is translated by the English word "robbers" is a word that means a hardened criminal.

They must have known that they were guilty of their many crimes.

So why would they want to abuse Jesus?

I think that the answer lies in the fact that later on one of these criminals actually believed in Jesus. He was convicted of his sin as he hung next to the Holy Jesus, who was without sin.

Luke Chapter 23: v. 39-43 in the N.K.J.

³⁹ Then one of the criminals who were hanged blasphemed Him, saying, "If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us." ⁴⁰ But the other, answering, rebuked him, saying, "Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? ⁴¹ And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong." ⁴² Then he said to Jesus, "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom." ⁴³ And Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise."

When people are confronted with the Holiness of Jesus, there are usually two reactions.

Either people get angry or upset because their sin is exposed, or they welcome the invitation of Jesus to come to Him for forgiveness.

In the case of the two criminals, this was an example of two opposite reactions.

We now come to the second half of my message which is God's commentary of Jesus actually on the cross.

2. God's Commentary on the cross – v. 45-56.

There are a number of events that Matthew records as a commentary on the cross.

We only have time to look at three of them.

1. **Supernatural Darkness – v. 45.** – When Jesus was born, the night sky around Bethlehem was filled with supernatural light as **the glory of the Lord shone around** the shepherds in the fields. (Luke 2: v.9)

John spoke of Jesus as the **light of men.** (John 1: v.4)

Jesus spoke of Himself as the **"light of the world".** (John 8:v.12)

But the first miraculous sign that accompanied Jesus's death on the cross was not wonderful light but awful darkness.

We are told that total darkness fell upon the land from the sixth hour until the ninth hour.

This was from 12 noon until 3p.m.

From historical records, that are not recorded in the Bible we are told that this darkness was world-wide and not just located around where Jesus hung on the cross.

During those three hours, the silence was broken by Jesus only 3 times.

The first was by His saying **"Father forgive them for they do not know what they are doing.(Luke 23: v.34)**

The second was to the repentant thief that was beside Jesus. He said to him **"Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise. (Luke 23:43)**

The final message was to His mother, Jesus said to her, **"Woman, behold your son, and to John Jesus said, "Behold your mother."**

Although the purpose of the darkness is not explained to us in the Bible, there are Old Testament and New Testament passages that associate God's judgement with darkness.

Joel Chapter 2: v.2. 7

² A day of darkness and gloominess,
A day of clouds and thick darkness,
Like the morning *clouds* spread over the mountains.
A people *come*, great and strong,
The like of whom has never been;
Nor will there ever be any *such* after them,
Even for many successive generations.

³ A fire devours before them,
And behind them a flame burns;
The land *is* like the Garden of Eden before them,
And behind them a desolate wilderness;
Surely nothing shall escape them.

⁴ Their appearance is like the appearance of horses;
And like swift steeds, so they run.

⁵ With a noise like chariots
Over mountaintops they leap,
Like the noise of a flaming fire that devours the stubble,
Like a strong people set in battle array.

⁶ Before them the people writhe in pain;
All faces are drained of color.
⁷ They run like mighty men,
They climb the wall like men of war;
Every one marches in formation,
And they do not break ranks.

Amos 5: v.20

²⁰ *Is not the day of the LORD darkness, and not light?
Is it not very dark, with no brightness in it?*

Zephaniah 1: v. 14-15.

¹⁴ The great day of the LORD *is* near;
It is near and hastens quickly.
The noise of the day of the LORD is bitter;
There the mighty men shall cry out.
¹⁵ That day *is* a day of wrath,
A day of trouble and distress,
A day of devastation and desolation,
A day of darkness and gloominess,
A day of clouds and thick darkness,

Jesus spoke frequently of divine judgement in terms of **“outer darkness”**. (Matt.8:12,22:13,25:30)
It is quite appropriate that the cross being a place of immense divine judgement, where the sins of the world were poured out on the sinless, perfect Son of God, that supernatural darkness **would be a visible reaction to us of an act of judgement by God.**

Some commentators have suggested that as Jesus was naked on the cross that his dignity was preserved during this time.

Although that is so it wasn't the main reason for the darkness.

2. God departing from Jesus – v. 46-49.

Perhaps the worst thing that happened to Jesus on the cross was the departure of God.

Jesus was fully aware that God had left Him for that moment in time.

We are told by Matthew in v. 46 that about the ninth hour, that was 3p.m. in the afternoon, **Jesus cried out with a “loud” voice.**

Crying out with a loud voice was a miracle in itself.

With all that Jesus had endured before he had been put on the cross and all the agony of hanging on the cross, it would be almost impossible for Jesus to speak, never mind cry out in a loud voice.

Nevertheless, what Jesus cried out was very important and everybody needed to hear that.

Jesus cried out;

“My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me.

Jesus was quoting from Psalm 22: v. 1 which would have been very familiar to all the Jewish people who stood near the cross.

Jesus was crying out in anguish because for the first and only time in all of eternity, Jesus was being separated from His heavenly father.

The question we need to ask is why”

The answer is simple.

Jesus at that moment was becoming **“sin”**.

Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5: v. 21 **“For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us.....”**

The prophet Habakkuk in Chapter 1: v.13 said **“You are of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on wickedness.....”**

God turned His back when Jesus was on the cross for this moment because He could not look upon sin.

Isaiah 53: v.5 tells us that Jesus was wounded for our transgressions or sins.

In 1 Peter 3: v. 18 it tells us that Jesus Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross.

When Jesus Christ was “forsaken” by His heavenly father it was not a question of Jesus ceasing to be God, or leaving the trinity unit in any way.

However, for a moment Jesus ceased to know the intimacy of a normal loving fellowship with His heavenly father.

The mystery of this separation from God is far too deep even for the most mature Christian to work out in their minds.

God has revealed this truth to us in order that we might accept and understand a little about the wonderful love that Jesus has for every believer.

Jesus was willing to suffer the worst that we might obtain the best.

3. The veil of the temple was torn in two. – v. 51.

If you know your Old Testament well, you will know that there was a curtain in the Temple and in the Tabernacle that separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies.

The Holy of Holies was where God’s presence symbolically lived with man.

Sinful man was not even allowed to look into this room. The curtain that hung between the two rooms was about 4 inches thick, which is about 10 C.M.

The curtain was also about 60 feet high (18 meters)

It was 30 feet in width, which is about 9 meters wide.

Even the High Priest was not allowed to enter the Holy of Holies except on the “Day of Atonement.”

Hebrews 9: v.7

⁷ But into the second part the high priest *went* alone once a year, not without blood, which he offered for himself and *for* the people’s sins *committed* in ignorance;

Leviticus 16: v.2.

² and the LORD said to Moses: “Tell Aaron your brother not to come at *just* any time into the Holy Place inside the veil, before the mercy seat which *is* on the ark, lest he die; for I will appear in the cloud above the mercy seat.

The day of atonement offering was a yearly ceremony which was a constant reminder of man’s need to have his sin hidden from the eyes of a Holy God.

The significance of this miracle is great and we must understand it.

The Bible says that we are born into this world with a sinful nature. We are separated from God and cannot come into His presence because of our sin.

It is our sin that separates us from God.

When the curtain was torn into two by God in a miraculous way it was done to illustrate two things.

a) Jesus’s body was sacrificed for you and me.

b) The barrier between God and man was now removed because of the death of Jesus.

Jesus had died so that we by the forgiveness of our sins can enter into God’s presence and live with Him forever.

Without the death of Jesus on the cross we wouldn’t be able to enter into God’s presence.

Sin provides a barrier between mankind and a holy God.

However, believing that Jesus died for your personal sins, takes away that barrier and you can enjoy God’s presence forever.

The problem for many people today is believing that it is their sin that separates them from a Holy God.

Most people like to judge themselves by the lives of other people.

They feel that they are not as bad as someone else.

However, they don’t measure their lives against a 100% Holy God.

If they did, they would realise that their lives were sinful.

If you are not a Christian yet, then your problem is understanding your sin, as God sees it.

Not as YOU see it.

Once you become convicted of your sin, then you will want to receive “forgiveness” and the only person that can do this for you is JESUS.

I hope that I have clearly explained this passage.

There are more things happening in this passage than I have time to explain.

The most significant being v. 52-53.

We are told that when Jesus actually died, graves were opened and some people who had died were raised from the dead, after the resurrection of Jesus.

We will leave the resurrection until next week.