

## The Aftermath of Christ's Crucifixion

Matt. 27:54-66

**Intro.** We respond to all sorts of things a thousand times a day. Perhaps our first response is to an alarm clock. Do you respond with joy you hear it? Do you jump out of bed and say, **"This is the day the Lord has made, I will rejoice and be glad in it?"**...or something like that. We then respond to text messages, phone calls, email and all kinds of conversation. We respond to heat, cold, hunger, pain, humor, anger, love, respect and fear. We respond to temptation, victories, disappointments and defeats. While some things don't matter much, HOW we respond to certain other things can alter the course of our lives. Chuck Swindoll once said, *"I'm convinced that life is 10% what happens to me, and 90% of how I react to it."* So HOW we respond is critical. This is especially true when it comes to Jesus Christ. Nothing is more important than our moment by moment response to Him.

Matthew's account of the life and ministry of Jesus has led us on a long journey. When Jesus was conceived in Mary the angel told Joseph, **"you are to give him the name Jesus, because He will save his people from their sins."** - Matt. 1:21 Now 33 years have passed and Jesus has forcefully proven that He is perfect humanity...God incarnate...Immanuel, God with us. **Chap. 27** reports the completion of this phase of Christ's mission because Jesus said He came **to serve and to give His life a ransom for many.** - Matt. 20:28 So now in **chap. 27** the deed is done. He came to His own and own did not receive Him. Numerous OT prophecies were fulfilled as Jesus suffered and died on Calvary's cross. Even while He was dying, God continued to provide witnesses to help people recognize who Jesus is so they might turn to Him and be saved.

After presenting his account of Jesus on the cross, Matthew includes three short paragraphs that describe what happened in the aftermath of the crucifixion. We tend to emphasize the cross of Christ and His resurrection but not much attention is given to His burial. Matthew doesn't do that. Instead He shows us the hand of God and prophecy fulfilled even in the details of the burial. Beyond that, in three short paragraphs, he presents a timeless vignette of ways people respond to our crucified savior. So let's unpack these verses from **v. 54** to the end of the chapter.

**1. Responding to the crucifixion of Jesus – vs. 54-56 - When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, "Surely he was the Son of God!" Many women were there, watching from a distance. They had followed Jesus from Galilee to care for his needs. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of Zebedee's sons.**

In these verses we find two groups of people and the way they responded to the crucifixion of Jesus. In **Jn.12:32** Jesus said His cross would have sort of a magnetic power. He said, **"But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself."** So, like the bronze serpent was lifted up on a pole in the time of Moses Jesus was been lifted up on a cross. People who look to Jesus with faith are saved, not from the poisonous bite of a snake, but from all their sins. So what Jesus said would happen was happening. The process of drawing people to Himself had begun.

First, Matthew explains how the centurion and the other soldiers responded. Now these soldiers didn't know anything about the Hebrew Scriptures that were being fulfilled. They hadn't yet heard about the torn temple curtain or the saints who came out of their tombs. They didn't understand the meaning of the things Jesus said from the cross. These details were like after-shocks people recognized and talked about later on. But as Jesus hung before them, they were struck with terror by a darkness that descended suddenly, a darkness so dense you could cut it with a knife. They felt the earth quake beneath their feet. They had no doubt witnessed the trials and perhaps participated in the flogging of Jesus. They sensed his innocence and witnessed His demeanor when beaten and abused. The effect of the **earthquake and all that had happened** was terrifying. The felt God speaking to them through these convulsions of nature.

Together they exclaimed, "**Surely he was the Son of God!**" Like the seed that fell on shallow soil, their response may have been entirely emotional and superficial. We hope it was more than that. We can be sure God's Spirit was at work awakening the conscience in each man. We'd like to believe these soldiers responded by repenting of their sins and trusting Jesus in a saving way, but we can't be sure. What we can be sure of is that God had sent darkness to awaken them to His light. He sent an earthquake to point them to the One who is the solid rock.

The fact that these men were ignorant of God's Word but impacted by all they saw reminds me of **I Pet. 3:1. Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives,** Notice...the behavior of a wife can have a powerful influence on an unbelieving husband. God may use her godly behavior to win him over without her preaching at him. In a similar way these men couldn't ignore the behavior of Jesus and the powerful witnesses God sent. They saw that Jesus was unique and unlike other men. They said, "**Surely he was the Son of God!**"

Then second, we see the loyalty of **many women** who watched all that was happening **from a distance.** They watched while the men fled and were hiding under a bush somewhere. The women probably watched from a distance out of respect and deep sadness. Perhaps they sensed that if they were closer to Jesus as He suffered their presence might have added to His humiliation. There may be a parallel in that period of time in the hospital when a patient wants no visitors.

I know this sounds sexist, but maybe it's sexist in a positive way. Would you agree that women tend to be more devout / more self-sacrificing / and more loyal than men? Raise your hand if you agree. (Because we admitted this, maybe the ladies would like to sing the Hallelujah Chorus or something). I don't like to hear that I'm not as devout, self-sacrificing and loyal as my wife, but I suspect it's true. Her feelings run deeper and are more intense than mine.

**v. 55** says, These women **had followed Jesus** all the way **from Galilee to care for his needs.** They loved Jesus. They had witnessed His tender manliness and He had won their hearts. It's interesting that female followers were the first to come to Christ's tomb and discover it was empty. Then after His resurrection, Jesus first revealed Himself to several women. God seems to have rewarded their faith and loyalty with sight. Later as the Church developed, we see women in a leading role caring for the apostles and for itinerant teachers...opening their homes as house churches. As we see in **v. 56** both women were named **Mary.**

So here we see two groups responding to Jesus in the aftermath of all that has happened. The soldiers were terrified but convinced that Jesus is the Son of God. And among His followers a couple of ladies remained faithful and close to Jesus. In the soldiers we see confession...in the women we see consecration. Both responses are appropriate for all who believe. By confession, we believe and are saved. By consecration our actions prove we believe and are saved.

**2. Respecting the body of Jesus – vs. 57-61** As evening approached, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who had himself become a disciple of Jesus. Going to Pilate, he asked for Jesus' body, and Pilate ordered that it be given to him. Joseph took the body, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and placed it in his own new tomb that he had cut out of the rock. He rolled a big stone in front of the entrance to the tomb and went away. **Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were sitting there opposite the tomb.**

In **Jn. 5:22, 23** Jesus said, **Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him.**

In this second paragraph we find a man whose faith was demonstrated by the way he honored the Lord Jesus. According to Jewish law, even a criminal's body had to be buried the same day he was executed. This was especially true when Jesus was crucified because the next day was the Sabbath. Now the Romans had no concern for the dead. If no relative came to claim the lifeless body, they would dispose of it in the valley of Gehenna...the smoking garbage dump of Jerusalem.

At this point can I interject something? Thank you, I think I will. Is it just me, or is there growing disrespect for the human body? Have bodies become disposable? Hollywood seems obsessed with death and dying where life is so cheap. We've heard horror stories of aborted babies found in dumpsters. Funeral homes have been found to have bodies decaying in storage. Funeral directors have told me that an increasing number of families do little to nothing for their deceased loved one or not so loved one...no memorial service / no internment / no grave marker...just make them go away. Their excuse often centers around cost. Now I'm no lobbyist for the Natl. Assoc. of Funeral Directors, and I know the cost of burial can be astronomical, but what concerns me is the growing disrespect for God's creation. And that's what we are. Each human being is God's special creation and the object of His love. At the root of our disrespect for the human body is disrespect for the Creator. This whole subject is uncomfortable, but we need to talk about it and stand against this growing manifesta-tion of godlessness.

Since Jesus came from Galilee, none of his relatives had a tomb in Jerusalem. Because his relatives were in no position to claim His body, someone from Jerusalem had to claim it. And God had already chosen the man. His name was Joseph of Arimathea. Joseph was a wealthy man and a member of the Sanhedrin. **Lk. 23:50, 51** says, **Now there was a man named Joseph, a member of the Council, a good and upright man, who had not consented to their decision and action. He came from the Judean town of Arimathea and he was waiting for the kingdom of God.** Moved by the Spirit of God, Joseph went to Pilate and asked that the body of Jesus be given to him. Unlike most of his contemporaries, Joseph had become a believer. He believed Jesus should be honored as God and His lifeless body should be treated with highest respect. So he gave Jesus his family tomb. In doing so, He claimed Jesus as family...his brother. Have you made that claim yourself?

So after Jesus' died Joseph went to Pilate to request Jesus' body. He did so at great risk to himself and his reputation. According to **Jn.19:39** he was accompanied by Nicodemus...the Pharisee who came to Jesus at night to ask questions about God's Kingdom. Pilate gave the men custody of Jesus and they immediately began to prepare His body for burial. Following Jewish custom, they wrapped the body in strips of linen and mixed in myrrh and aloe. Because it was late on the Day of Preparation and the Sabbath was about to begin, Joseph and Nicodemus hurriedly placed Jesus in Joseph's tomb. The tomb was located in a garden near Golgotha where Jesus was crucified.

By the actions, a prophecy made hundreds of years before Jesus' came was fulfilled. **Isa. 53:9** says, **"He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth."** This is yet another prophecy Jesus fulfilled that confirmed His identity as the Messiah and Son of God.

In that day tombs were often caverns hewn out of the rock. The entrance was sealed with a heavy round stone that was rolled in place. Though centuries have passed and no one is entirely sure, the garden tomb people visit today could be the actual burial place of Jesus. Whether it is or isn't, today the garden tomb is the site of continuous worship services.

This section ends with another mention of Mary Magdalene and the other Mary. They were near the cross when Jesus died. Now we find them near the tomb. Their loyalty hasn't wavered. Their love and devotion was unmistakable. Their devotion and the respect shown by Joseph and Nicodemus remind me of the lyrics of an old hymn written as a prayer.

*Jesus Keep me near the cross. There a precious fountain.  
Free to all a healing stream. Flows from Calvary's mountain.  
In the cross, In the cross, be my glory ever.  
Till my ransomed soul shall find, rest beyond the river."*

Like Joseph, Nicodemus and these women, the secret power of believers today belongs to those who honor the Son of God and stay near His cross.

**3. Resisting the promise of Jesus - vs. 62-66 - The next day, the one after Preparation Day, the chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate. "Sir," they said, "we remember that while he was still alive that deceiver said, 'After three days I will rise again.' So give the order for the tomb to be made secure until the third day. Otherwise, his disciples may come and steal the body and tell the people that he has been raised from the dead. This last deception will be worse than the first." "Take a guard," Pilate answered. "Go, make the tomb as secure as you know how." So they went and made the tomb secure by putting a seal on the stone and posting the guard.**

Up to this time, Jesus has been resisted every way possible. From His birth to His death, He experienced persistent unbelief, rejection and hostility. Now the Jews had carried out their evil plan and Jesus had been eliminated...or so they thought. The Preparation Day was Friday and the lambs were sacrificed from 3 PM to 6 PM...the final hours when Jesus suffered on the cross. The next day was Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath. Violating every Sabbath rule, the chief priests and Pharisees went to Pilate. These colossal hypocrites set aside and bent every rule to suit their evil schemes. And they weren't ignorant of Christ's promises. They took Jesus literally when He said, **'After three days I will rise again.'** Though they condemned Jesus as a charlatan and deceiver, they refused to take any chances. To make sure His disciples couldn't come and steal the body, they asked Pilate to secure His tomb until the third day. If the disciples could say Jesus had risen from the dead they were certain **"This last deception will be worse than the first."** In other words, the lie that Jesus had risen from the dead would be more damaging to their cause than His claim to be Israel's Messiah and King. The trouble it would cause would be worse than His claim to deity and all the other remarkable claims He made. They understood the implications if people believed Jesus rose from the dead!

Their fears were well founded. News that Jesus rose from the dead was terrible for all who opposed and crucified Him. Since no human being ever fulfilled the promise to raise himself from the dead, the impact of Jesus alive and walking around was enormous...but not because it was a lie...Jesus really did rise from the dead! The news that spread across the nation and beyond was true and substantiated by many infallible proofs. It wasn't a lie made up by the disciples. The resurrection of Jesus Christ turned the upside down world right side up!

Hoping to placate the religious leaders and keep the peace, Pilate did what they asked him to do. He ordered that a guard accompany the Jews to make the tomb **"as secure as you know how."** I find his words amusing? Pilate said, *"Do all you can...spare no effort...give it your best shot...this deceiver has to be kept under wraps. Jesus must stay in the grave!"* How did that work out for you Pilate? So they sealed the tomb and set a special guard that consisted of men whose lives were at stake. Once again, Jesus and His promises were resisted. Men actually thought a security guard could prevent Jesus from fulfilling His Word by rising from the dead.

Listen....there isn't a tomb in the world that could imprison Jesus Christ. There isn't a team of night watchmen able to resist and arrest even one of heaven's angels. Not the cleverest scheme of man can stop the sovereign purposes of God. The soldiers charged to guard the tomb, were given a hopeless assignment. The same is true for every person who attempts to resist Christ...to deny His claims and refuse His Lordship. What Christ has revealed in this book is irresistible!

So in this closing section of **Matt. 27** we see people reacting to the crucifixion of Jesus. Some responded in faith...they believed Jesus was the Son of God / some risked their lives to honor Him. But on the other hand, some tried to resist the promises He made. Like a vignette of humanity, the same reactions are present today. In the aftermath of Calvary, some have believed with great loyalty and reverence. Yet refusing to believe Him, others continue to mock and ridicule His promises. He said He came to give His life a ransom for many...and He did. He said He would rise again the third day...and He did. He said He would ascend to heaven...and He did. He said He would build His church...and He has. He said He will return in power and glory...and He will!

As the men come to serve communion and as we prepare our hearts for the Lord's table, let's quietly sing that old hymn...Jesus keep me near the cross.

1. Jesus, keep me near the cross,  
 There a precious fountain—  
 Free to all, a healing stream—  
 Flows from Calv'ry's mountain.

In the cross, in the cross,  
 Be my glory ever;  
 Till my raptured soul shall find  
 Rest beyond the river.

2. Near the cross, a trembling soul,  
 Love and Mercy found me;  
 There the bright and morning star  
 Sheds its beams around me.

3. Near the cross! O Lamb of God,  
 Bring its scenes before me;  
 Help me walk from day to day,  
 With its shadows o'er me.

4. Near the cross I'll watch and wait  
 Hoping, trusting ever,  
 Till I reach the golden strand,  
 Just beyond the river.