

He Did This For Me!

Matt. 27:27-44

Intro. What was the greatest thing ever done for you? Can you think of something? My point this morning is that nothing could ever surpass the suffering and death Jesus endured for us. No act of loving kindness could ever be greater the fact that Jesus died for you and me.

The closing chapters of Matthew's Gospel are *holy ground*. The death of Jesus is the climax of Matthew's Gospel and the point toward which everything has been moving. The cross is the centerpiece of history and the absolute key to eternal redemption. Because these verses tell the story of our Savior's suffering, I hardly know how to speak about them. I'm not the only preacher to feel this way. In his commentary on Matthew, James Montgomery Boice wrote, "*Here we come to the Holy of Holies of our Lord's life on earth. This is a mystery like that which Moses saw when the bush burned with fire, and was not consumed. No man can rightly expound such a passage as this; it is a subject for prayerful heart-broken meditation, more than for human language.*" So you'll have to excuse me if I don't have any jokes or anecdotal stories. Solomon wrote, to everything there is a time and a season. I would suggest to you that this is a time for us to quietly approach God's Word with an extra measure of reverence. Let's PRAY.

In the context of **Matt. 27** we see evil forces and evil men doing their worst. Yet it's shocking to realize that Jesus submitted to what God has allowed these men to do. The Father stood by as His Son was treated with such cruelty and brutality. Because of the evil and suffering in the world, some have accused God of not being as loving or powerful as Christians say He is. Others claim God isn't aware of everything. Still others insist that God isn't there at all.

I once heard of a man whose son was killed by a drunk driver. With his faith on the verge of collapse, this distraught father came to his pastor with a question. He asked, "*Where was God when my son was killed?*" The pastor gently answered, "*God was where He was when His own son was killed.*" Yet more astounding than the evil God allowed men to unleash against His Son, is the fact that in His foreknowledge He knew and planned it all beforehand. This convergence of free will and divine sovereignty is impossible for us to understand completely, but here's what Peter said on the Day of Pentecost. **"Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. - Acts. 2:22, 23** Notice that phrase...**This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge...**That's divine sovereignty. That's God in control of every circumstance. That's God executing His plan to save us...a plan driven by His love for you and me. And this same loving Father controls the circumstances in our lives...He holds us in His hands through joy and sorrow, pleasure and pain.

But here's the mystery that seems impossible to resolve...divine sovereignty doesn't absolve human responsibility. Notice how **v.23** ends... **and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross.** Even though God planned the death of Christ, human actors, were responsible for rejecting Him / betraying Him / abusing Him and / carrying out the crucifixion. So divine sovereignty and human responsibility walk together. When you get this figured out, be sure to explain it to me. I just believe what the Bible says whether I understand it all or not.

This morning we come to the abuse Jesus suffered and the crucifixion itself. All four Gospel writers include an account of the cross. Commentaries, sermons and Hollywood productions tend to sensationalize the gruesome physical suffering Jesus endured. While His pain and agony defy description, that isn't what the Gospel accounts emphasize. The Gospels are factual but discrete. They emphasize the injustice, the humiliation and the emotional torment Jesus endured for us.

Matthew's account emphasizes the hatred / wickedness / and vile inhumanity of the participants ...the role they played and the prophecies they fulfilled. Dr. John MacArthur writes, "*Man's wickedness attempted to kill Jesus shortly after his birth, tried to discredit his teaching, and made every effort to mislead and corrupt His disciples. Man's wickedness had betrayed him, denied him, arrested, maligned, and battered Him. But the incomparable manifestation of man's wickedness was in His crucifixion.*" Matthew's intention was to present the cross in such a way that God's Spirit can use it to convict us of sin, righteousness and judgment. I've divided the passage according to the participants.

1. Jesus mocked by Roman soldiers – vs. 27-37 - Let's approach these eleven verses in three sections. First, **vs. 27-30** - **Then the governor's soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole company of soldiers around him. They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand and knelt in front of him and mocked him. "Hail, king of the Jews!" they said. They spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again.**

After the crowd demanded the release of Barabbas instead of Jesus, Pilate gave the order for Jesus to be **flogged** or *scourged* (as some translations say). **Flogging** was particularly cruel and brutal. The Roman scourge or *flagrum* was a short whip made of leather strips fastened to a handle. The leather strips were knotted with pieces of metal or bone. The condemned criminal was tied to a column or a post and whipped across his back. The *flagrum* tore open the skin, ripped away tissue and exposed muscle. Due to excessive blood loss, flogging left its victim near death. With no legal limit to the amount of blows that could be administered, the flogging ended only when it was feared the victim might die and be spared the agony of the crucifixion to follow.

After the flogging Pilate's soldiers led Jesus into the **Praetorium**. The **Praetorium** was Pilate's headquarters. It was located in the Antonia Fortress just outside the northwestern walls of Jerusalem. Surrounded by a company of the governor's elite guard, the soldiers stripped Jesus and put a scarlet robe on him. The Son of God was forced to stand naked. Mocking His claim to be king, the robe was probably a soldier's tunic that was tattered and faded. Its **scarlet** color reminds us that the Lord says, **"Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool."** - **Isa. 1:18**. Jesus was robed with our sin so that we might be clothed in the purity of His righteousness.

There in some interior room these soldiers gathered around Jesus began to abuse Him. The verbs in these verses describe what they did: We need a quiet moment to absorb each humiliating thing they did to Jesus.

- **They stripped him**
- **They put a scarlet robe on him**
- **They twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head**
- **They put a staff in his right hand and knelt in front of him and mocked him**
- **They spit on him**
- **They took the staff and struck him on the head again and again**

The other Gospels say the soldiers punched Jesus with their fists. Yet in silence, the Scripture was fulfilled as Jesus made no attempt to resist them. **Isa. 50:6** - **I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard; I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting.** Having witnessed terrible inhumanities in our own time, we can imagine men doing what they did to Jesus. It's easier to imagine when we realize His executioners were battle-hardened soldiers and Jesus had been judged guilty of a political crime. These soldiers came from other parts of the empire and probably knew very little about Jesus.

What they said and did to Him was their reaction to His claim to be the **King of the Jews**. They had pledged their allegiance to Caesar and Caesar allowed no rivals. Still it's shocking to realize they did these things to One who is King of kings and Lord of lords...the Son of God who came to save us even them from their sins. And once again, the Father let them do it.

Why a crown of thorns? Beginning at the fall in **Gen. 3**, thorns and thistles became a symbol of sin's curse. Because of Adam's sin, God cursed the ground and said, **It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. - Gen. 3:18**. Creation still groans under sin's curse according to **Rom 8:22**. The crown of thorns pressed into Jesus' scalp represented **the iniquity of us all** placed on Jesus. - **Isa. 53:6** This thorny crown symbolized the curse Jesus bore for us. Yet there's terrible irony in the soldier's actions. The mock staff put in Jesus hand mimicked the scepter in Caesar's hand. Jesus referred to His image stamped on Roman coins. After placing the staff in His hand, they mocked His authority by taking the staff and using it to strike Him on the head. The irony is that in a coming day when Christ returns, He will rule the nations, not with a wooden staff, but with **an iron scepter. - Rev. 19:15** On that day, the authority committed to Jesus Christ will be universally recognized and every knee will bow to Him. Yet He endured all this for you and for me.

Next, let's read **vs. 31-34 - After they had mocked him, they took off the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him. As they were going out, they met a man from Cyrene, named Simon, and they forced him to carry the cross. They came to a place called Golgotha (which means The Place of the Skull). There they offered Jesus wine to drink, mixed with gall; but after tasting it, he refused to drink it.**

It's estimated a cross could have weighed upwards of 200 lbs. It was an awful weight to be carried by a man deprived of sleep and already battered and weakened by pain and blood loss. When Jesus stumbled under the weight, the soldiers forced an African man named Simon to carry the cross. **Mk. 15:21** adds a few more details about Simon. **A certain man from Cyrene, Simon, the father of Alexander and Rufus, was passing by on his way in from the country, and they forced him to carry the cross.** Mark named **Alexander and Rufus** because these brothers were apparently well known in the Christian community when Mark wrote his account. Simon was no doubt a Jew or a proselyte to Judaism who had come to Jerusalem for Passover. He may have come to faith in Jesus as he carried the cross to Golgotha and became an eye-witness to all that happened there. Later his family believed and his wife became like a mother to the Apostle Paul. In part, this fulfilled **Jn. 8:28** where Jesus said, **"When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am the one I claim to be..."** By submitting to the cross, Jesus fulfilled the Scriptures and demonstrated His obedience to the Father's plan. The witness of the cross would inspire some to believe.

Notice **they led him away to crucify him**. As the Law required, Jesus was taken outside of Jerusalem to be crucified. **Num. 15:35** speaks of a man guilty of a capital offense. **Then the LORD said to Moses, "The man must die. The whole assembly must stone him outside the camp."** The fact that Jesus was crucified outside the city limits fulfilled another requirement with respect to Israel's sacrifices. **Heb. 13:11-13** says, **The high priest carries the blood of animals into the Most Holy Place as a sin offering, but the bodies are burned outside the camp. And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood.** These verses go on to say...**Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore. Outside the camp** means outside the confines of organized religion and ritualism. Religion often leads people away from Jesus, not to Him. Even in Christian churches, religion or churchianity can have the same effect. It can become a substitute for knowing and following Christ. We meet Jesus, or I should say, He meets us not in a building or a system, but in the quietness of a humble and receptive heart.

And just as Simon carried Christ's cross, there's a cross for us to carry too.

In **Matt. 16:24** - Jesus told His disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. The cross represents a willingness to suffer and to surrender our lives for His sake. It's a cross that appears foolish and disgraceful to those who don't understand or believe as we do. In **I Cor. 1:18** Paul wrote, **For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.**

Golgotha means place of the skull. While the actual location hasn't been positively identified, it's believed to be a rocky bluff that has the natural shape of a skull. The hill was adjacent to a thoroughfare where passers by could see the crucified victims and be warned. Because it was the Season of Passover, the traffic was heavy with pilgrims coming from the surrounding nations. As you can see, today busses carrying tourists park in the lot below. The exposure added to our Savior's humiliation. And remember, Jesus endured all this for you and me.

v. 34 says, **There they offered Jesus wine to drink, mixed with gall; but after tasting it, he refused to drink it.** To deaden the pain before driving the nails into his hands and feet, it was customary to offer the victim a sponge of wine to which a drug was added. Jesus refused this narcotic. He was determined to experience the pain and agony to the fullest. By offering Jesus this to Jesus the soldiers unknowingly fulfilled a Messianic prophecy given 1,000 years earlier. **Psa. 69:21** says, **They put gall in my food and gave me vinegar for my thirst.**

Then vs. 35-37 says, **When they had crucified him, they divided up his clothes by casting lots. And sitting down, they kept watch over him there. Above his head they placed the written charge against him: THIS IS JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS.** Four soldiers known as a quaternion escorted Jesus through Jerusalem's streets. They actually carried out the crucifixion. **When they had crucified Him** means, when they had stood His cross up. Having driven spikes through His hands and feet, they lifted Him on the cross. Over His head they placed a sign that stated the charge against Him. It read, **THIS IS JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS.** **Jn. 19:21, 22** says, **The chief priests of the Jews protested to Pilate, "Do not write 'The King of the Jews,' but that this man claimed to be king of the Jews." Pilate answered, "What I have written, I have written."** After Jesus was lifted up on the cross the soldiers sat down and watched Him suffer. Once again they fulfilled the Scriptures when they cast lots and made a game out of dividing up Jesus' clothing. **Psa. 22:18** - **They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing.**

Now remember, Matthew wrote this account primarily for the Jews to convince them that Jesus was their Messiah. The things that were done to Jesus couldn't have happened by way of self-fulfilled prophecy. By self-fulfilled, I mean a prediction that is known and then intentionally brought to pass. These Roman soldiers had no knowledge of the OT or Messianic predictions. It was impossible for them to intentionally bring to pass details they'd never read or heard! The prophecies were fulfilled because God was in charge...fulfilling His Word and demonstrating His sovereignty through things the primary actors said and did. This is precisely what the Jewish people needed to realize. It's what Peter preached when He said, **This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross.** - **Acts 2:23** And once again, remember that Jesus suffered all this for you and for me.

2. Jesus mocked by two criminals – vs. 38-40, 44 - **Two robbers were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left. Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, "You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!"** Then, **v.44** - **In the same way the robbers who were crucified with him also heaped insults on him.** Now remember, the middle cross of the three was probably intended for Barabbas. But Barabbas was now a free man. The guilty man was set free while the innocent man was crucified.

In this we find a picture of God's salvation plan. **II Cor. 5:21 - God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.** As sinners, we identify with Barabbas. We are the guilty ones...the ones deserving of death. But according to God's plan, Jesus died the death we deserved so that we could be justified, forgiven and set free.

Caught up in the animosity and vitriol that spread like a virus, passers by hurled insults at Jesus. This was also prophesied centuries earlier. **Psa. 22:7, 8** say, **All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads: "He trusts in the LORD; let the LORD rescue him. Let him deliver him, since he delights in him."** Have you noticed how quickly false rumors spread? The talking points of these passers by came right from the mouths of two false witnesses the Jews had brought to Pilate to testify against Jesus. In **Matt. 26:61** these two witnesses said, **"This fellow said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and rebuild it in three days.'"** The temple Jesus spoke of was His own body...the locus of God...the Temple where God's Spirit dwelled. But no one understood that. Jesus meant that His body would be destroyed by crucifixion...but He would then be gloriously raised to life again on the third day. It happened just as He said it would.

But why did Jesus have to die on a cross? Stoning was the Jewish method of execution. The answer has to do with the significance of crucifixion itself. The OT says those whose bodies are hung on a tree are cursed. **Deut. 21:22, 23 - If a man guilty of a capital offense is put to death and his body is hung on a tree, you must not leave his body on the tree overnight. Be sure to bury him that same day, because anyone who is hung on a tree is under God's curse.** By crucifying Jesus, the religious leaders felt this would end any notion that Jesus was the Messiah. They felt certain everyone would realize the true Messiah would never be cursed by God. The cross was a symbol of shame for both the Jews and the Romans. Only slaves, political rebels, and the worst of criminals was put to death in this inhumane way. This is what Paul meant in **Phil. 2:8 - And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death--even death on a cross!**

Later, in his letter to the church at Galatia, Paul explained why Jesus was put to death on a cross. He quoted the passage from **Deut. 21**. He wrote,...**Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree."** - **Gal. 3:13** The fact is, Jesus bore our curse... the curse we were under. The guilt and shame of our sin was transferred to Him. On the cross Jesus paid the price to cancel sin's curse and purchase us for God. Yet more than the physical agony of the cross was the hours when God the Father turned away. We'll consider **v. 46** next time, but it says, **About the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?"--which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"** The Father turned away because He couldn't look on the sin and shame that was heaped on His Son. Speaking of God's holiness, the prophet Habakkuk wrote, **Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; - Hab. 1:13** And yes, our sin really was transferred to Jesus. For the first and last time in all eternity, Jesus was alone. The fellowship with His Father was broken because of our sin. Jesus endured not only the physical pain, but the emotional agony of being forsaken by God. He did this for you and me.

3. Jesus mocked by Israel's religious leaders - vs. 41-43 - In the same way the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders mocked him. "He saved others," they said, "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. He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, 'I am the Son of God.'" In the same way the robbers who were crucified with him also heaped insults on him.

The Roman soldiers knew next to nothing about Jesus so they were less responsible for their actions. They were men carrying out the orders. Though Jewish, the two robbers probably knew very little about Jesus aside from some jailhouse talk.

But **the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders** were without excuse. They were supposed to be the Scripture experts. They should have known what the prophets said about God's coming Messiah. They had heard the witness of John and the teachings of Jesus. They had seen His miracles firsthand. They had **tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age**. They should have recognized the glory of God in the face of Jesus. But they didn't. In **v.42** they even admitted that Jesus had **saved others**. They even admitted He had power to come down from the cross. Their taunts sound so much like Satan when he tempted Jesus in the wilderness. They said, come down from the cross and we'll believe. Their eyes were blind and they didn't understand the salvation Jesus came to provide could only be accomplished by way of the cross. Not only did they taunt Jesus, but they mocked God. Can I tell you...that's something you never want to do! It's never wise to mock God! (Beware Bill Nye!) In fact, the Bible says it's impossible. **Gal. 6:7 - Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows.** To mock God is like standing on railroad tracks and mocking an oncoming train. It's like mocking gravity on the way down.

The robbers heard the religious leaders mocking Jesus and joined them. Those who should have known and praised the Son of God actually led others to deny and mock Him. Yet Jesus endured all this for you and me. History reports and almost everyone agrees that Christ died on a cross. But the Spirit of God explains why Jesus died. The Scriptures say **Christ died for our sins. - I Cor. 15:3**

When approaching these closing chapters, David Platt makes a helpful observation. He writes... *"Some radical thing had to happen to reconcile sinful and depraved humanity to the God who is holy. Something radical had to happen to span the great divide between God and man."* He is so right! That *"radical thing"* is the cross. If humanity is basically OK and getting better all the time, the cross was unnecessary...but that isn't the case. If we could educate and socialize ourselves out from under the curse of sin, then Jesus died needlessly. But humanity is destined for punishment and it's not possible for us to save ourselves. So, God did this radical thing to save us. And the cross was no afterthought or backup plan. It wasn't plan B or C...it was plan A. The sacrifice of God's Son was conceived in eternity past before creation! God knew all about our sin problem before it ever expressed itself. But because He loves us, He planned to save us by having His Son bear our sin and suffer the penalty we deserved. So, the cross is that *"radical thing"* that had to happen. The cross is God at great cost intervening to rescue us when there was no other way. And if you'll abandon every effort at self-salvation and trust Jesus alone to save you, He will do that. He will forgive you and cleanse you. Heaven's door will swing open wide for you to enter.

4. Jesus mocks Satan, death and the grave – Matt. 28 / Psa. 2:1-4

In our text this AM we see Jesus rejected, abused, mocked and crucified. But God's story doesn't end on that note. It doesn't end at **chap. 27**. Praise God for **chap. 28!** As Tony Campollo said, *"It's Friday, but Sunday's comin."* Early on Sunday morning, Jesus shattered the stronghold of sin and arose victorious over death and the grave. In the end, He did come down from the cross...He did save Himself. He did just what wicked men challenged Him to do. But in the process of laying down His life, He lifted up all who trust Him. He saved us. Though men had mocked Him and done their worst, Jesus rose from the grave, stripped Satan of power and completely conquered sin and death.

As the saying goes...*"He who laughs last, laughs best."* I wouldn't presume to accuse God of laughing at those who reject His Son if the Bible didn't say He does. But listen to **Psa. 2:1-4 - Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the LORD and against his Anointed One. "Let us break their chains," they say, "and throw off their fetters." The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them.** The cross of Christ demands both a decision and a commitment. So where do you stand? Is the centerpiece of redemption history, the centerpiece of your life? Jesus did this for you!