

“Jesus Was Abandoned”

Matthew 27:37-50

³⁷ Above his head they placed the written charge against him: THIS IS JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS.

³⁸ Two rebels were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left. ³⁹ Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads ⁴⁰ 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!” ⁴¹ In the same way the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders mocked him. ⁴² “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. ⁴³ He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, ‘I am the Son of God.’” ⁴⁴ In the same way the rebels who were crucified with him also heaped insults on him.

⁴⁵ From noon until three in the afternoon darkness came over all the land. 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?”).

⁴⁷ When some of those standing there heard this, they said, “He’s calling Elijah.”

⁴⁸ Immediately one of them ran and got a sponge. He filled it with wine vinegar, put it on a staff, and offered it to Jesus to drink. ⁴⁹ The rest said, “Now leave him alone. Let’s see if Elijah comes to save him.”

⁵⁰ And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit.

For much of its history, the United States of America has not been so united. For centuries, American society was racially segregated. From schools to buses, public restrooms to drinking fountains, restaurants to churches, the country was divided into black and white. Hospitals were among the last institutions to desegregate because many people were afraid they might get the “wrong blood” during a transfusion. They feared that if they received blood from a person of another color or ethnicity, they might actually develop the characteristics of that race.

All that changed when Dr. Charles Drew came along. In the 1930's, Dr. Drew created the process we now use to make plasma. Plasma comes from blood, but it is not type-specific, which means it can be used to treat bleeding patients without the need for whole blood. Dr. Drew’s discovery was so noteworthy that he was asked to head the Blood for Britain campaign during

World War II. After the war, Drew founded the American Blood Bank, which is still in operation today.

Ironically, Dr. Charles Drew died in 1950 at the age of 46 because he did not receive a blood transfusion or blood plasma in time. Dr. Drew was injured in an automobile accident and taken to a hospital that was still segregated - a hospital that would not admit black people. And since Dr. Drew was a black man, he bled to death. Dr. Charles Drew dedicated his life to saving lives yet he was unable to save his own.

Sound familiar? As Jesus hung on the cross, the leaders of the religious establishment 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!" It is only in retrospect that we can appreciate the injustice of Dr. Drew's death. Because public policy has changed, we may believe we're different from the people of 1950. We cling to the belief that we would have behaved in a more caring manner than those who turned Dr. Drew away during his time of need. But can we be sure of that?

What about Jesus' death on the cross? Are we any different today than those who mocked the Savior and drove nails through his hands and feet? Unless we truly appreciate what he did for us, we aren't different at all. We have to put our faith in Jesus and make him Lord and Savior of our lives. Only then can we be changed by him from the inside out.

Let's look for a moment at verse 27.

1) Jesus was crucified. (vv.27-56)

When we think of Jesus' crucifixion we think of the cross. But there was more that went on before Jesus went to the cross. In vv. 27-31 Jesus was mocked and beaten by the Roman soldiers. It was common practice for Rome in those days to recruit their soldiers from Syria. Coming from Syria they knew the Aramaic language spoken by the Jews & they were well acquainted with Jewish customs. Here, as many Roman soldiers as were on hand gathered around Jesus to make fun of Him. Pilate had ordered the scourging, but in the process the soldiers mocked Him.

In some ways, this was similar to what Jesus had already been through in the house of Caiaphas. They took His clothes. Then they threw around his shoulders a discarded & faded soldier's mantle of bright red.

Somewhere in the vicinity of the Praetorium, the soldiers found some thorny twigs. Thorns and thistles were mentioned in connection with Adam's fall in Genesis 3 - as a picture of the curse that lies upon nature because of our sin. It was those very thorns that were made into a crown and pressed down on Jesus' head. After they forced Jesus to sit down, they gave Him a

sturdy reed for a scepter. Then they mocked Him by dropping to their knees in front of Jesus & saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" One by one they took their turn until all had shared in the fun. Then they spit in His face & sadistically beat Him.

After all that, Pilate comes into the picture again. In this blood-streaked state - covered with gashing wounds - still wearing the crown of thorns and robe - Pilate brings Jesus to the crowd in an attempt to arouse their sympathy. But John's gospel records (John 19) that when the chief priests and the officers saw Jesus they simply began to scream: "Crucify! Crucify!" So the soldiers removed Jesus robe, gave His old clothes back to Him, and led Him away to be crucified. It was part of this Roman punishment that the condemned man would carry his own cross to the execution site. But as they left for Golgotha, Jesus was too weak any longer to carry His cross.

So, a man named Simon from Cyrene was forced to carry Jesus cross out of the city. Commentators are divided on the question of whether Simon carried the entire cross or whether he just carried the crossbeam. Since there is nothing in the Bible that suggests otherwise, I think it is best that we assume Simon carried the entire cross.

Matthew records surprisingly little detail about Jesus' crucifixion itself. They reached Golgotha. They gave Him wine mixed with gall - as a way to deaden His pain. But once He tasted it, Jesus was unwilling to drink it. And when they crucified Him, they cast lots - sort of like shaking dice - to see who would receive His garments. Even after He has been nailed to the cross, they continue to mock Him.

The sign over His head, Jesus the King of the Jews, indicates for all passing by the sad end of one who has made such extravagant claims. People on the road passing by were mocking Him & abusing Him. Even one of the robbers who was crucified with Him did the same. It was a dark and dismal afternoon.

Crucifixion was perhaps the most humiliating form of punishment in the first century world. But even in the middle of all that, there were those who watched who knew Jesus was not guilty and who knew that this punishment was not just. But Jesus' defeat was not complete even yet. He was condemned. He was crucified. But there is still more.

2) Jesus was abandoned. (vv. 46, 57-61)

On the day we remember as Palm Sunday, five days before the events we just described, Jesus' entry to Jerusalem was triumphant. Remember the huge crowds that were there? Remember how the people were throwing their coats in the street in front of Jesus? Remember

what they were saying? “Hosanna, Son of David!” It was an immense crowd . Now look at verse 57.

Now it’s Friday evening. A disciple of Jesus , Joseph of Arimathea, came to Pilate and asked for Jesus’ body, wrapped it in a clean linen and laid it in a tomb he had been preparing for himself. Then he rolled the stone against the entrance & went away. And the only people left are Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James. What a change...from huge crowds to two grieving women. Even His closest disciples had run.

But Jesus was abandoned in another way as well on that fateful Friday. You’ll notice that we didn’t talk about verse 46 earlier. Let’s do that now.

Let’s jump back to the time when Jesus was still on the cross. It is the ninth hour, three o’clock in the afternoon. The crowds are jeering and Jesus is in excruciating pain.

With a loud voice, Jesus cries out: “My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me?” It was at that moment that as God poured out His anger at our sin even God the Father turned His back on the Son. And so, at that moment Jesus was even abandoned by the one with whom He had been closest for all eternity.

It happened because His Father turned away...turned His back on His own Son. Almost everyone else close to Him in any way had turned and run.

In the Parable of the Prodigal Son, the boy ran , returned and His Father ran out to meet him. But not so here. On this day, the Son had never run. Yet His Father turned away...because that day Christ carried all the filth of every sin of those whom God had called to be His children.

For those who had lived before that fateful day, they could only look ahead in faith that God would keep His promise and send a Messiah.

For you and me it is not such a matter. For us we no longer look ahead. Instead, we look back believing Jesus is God the Son.

We can look back to this day and realize that Jesus did that day for us what we could never do for ourselves. He bore the load of every moment of every punishment we could ever earn or deserve...it ALL was paid for...every bit of it.

It IS finished. And your life with Him has just begun.

Let’s pray.