

# THE TRIUMPH OF GOD COMES BY THE OBEDIENT DEATH OF HIS SON

## Matthew 27:32-56

*Please review this week's catechism question.*

Did you meet anyone new at church on Sunday?

### INTRODUCTION

Imagine that you are an aborigine living in the outback of Australia. One day a stranger shows up in your village and begins to live among you. He learns your language and eventually tells you the gospel of Christ. The main point he seeks to impress upon you is that the main event in his religion is that the founder of his religion, Jesus, was betrayed, tortured and killed upon a cross. Do you think that would seem a little strange to you?

The claim of the Christian faith that the death of Jesus is the most powerful act of God in the history of the universe is an astonishing claim. It is what sets Christianity apart from every human religion. The apostle Paul says this about the death of Jesus, "...we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God." (1 Cor. 1:23-24) In Col. 3:15 he says, "And having disarmed the rulers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross." It is the claim of the NT that the power and glory of Christ is most clearly revealed in the weakness and shame of the cross. As Matthew recounts the event of the crucifixion he is seeking, through the story he tells to show how Christ's glory is most clearly seen in this gruesome death.

### STUDY

1. Almost every line in this passage is either a direct quote of or an allusion to dozens of OT passages. Compare Matthew 27: 32-50 with

Psalms 22: 1-17 & 69:20-21 to see some of the passages to which Matthew is alluding.

- V. 34 with Psalm 69:21
- V. 35a with Psalm 22:14, 15, 16b, 17
- V. 35b with Psalm 22:18
- VV. 36, 39-44 with Psalm 22:6-7, 12-13, 16a, 17b
- V. 43 with Psalm 22:8
- VV. 47-49 with Psalm 69:19-21
- V. 46 with Psalm 22:1

2. What is Matthew's point in showing how all of Jesus' suffering is the fulfillment of dozens of prophetic words in the OT?

*The point he is making is that all of this evil is no accident. God did not hold a gun to anyone's head and force them to do these things. Every person is acting according to the desires of their own hearts. God does not do the evil yet all the evil that is done is according to his will. Jesus is not a helpless victim. He submits to the predetermined plan of God and so demonstrates he is in control of the evil, not under the control of it.*

3. In vv. 37-43 what are all the true things that are said about Jesus by those who mock him, even though they mean them as mockery?

*In v. 37 we are told that Pilate had a sign put over his head that said, "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews." That is exactly right, Jesus is the long awaited King of the Jews. Pilate put the sign over Jesus as was required in all executions, to identify the crime for which Jesus was being crucified. The people passing by mock Jesus by quoting the false charge that was leveled at him during his "trial" before the Jewish ruling council. "You who tears down the temple and rebuilds it in three days, save yourself." They are actually quoting in part something that Jesus actually said as recorded in John 2: 19, in response to the demand of the Jewish leaders that he show them a miracle. He said, "Destroy this temple and I will raise it again in three days." Then in v. 22 we are told, "After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said." In other words, the words of mocking bear witness to the resurrection, which they do not*

*intend. The mocking words of the Jewish religious leaders are full of affirmations of the true identity of Christ. They acknowledge he is the Savior. They call him the King of Israel and the Son of God. They confess that he trusts in God.*

**4.** What is the point of quoting all these true things on the lips of Jesus' enemies?

*They mean all this as scornful derision however, Matthew, by recording their comments is directing our attention to the irony in these words. All those who mock Jesus confess things about him that are true, even though they don't intend to do so. Christ rules over the tongues of his enemies.*

**5.** Compare the last sentence of v. 40 with Matthew 4:1-11. What are we to see in the mockery and in Jesus' remaining on the cross?

*Satan, three years before this while tempting Jesus at the end of his 40 day fast in the wilderness dared Jesus to turn stones to bread and to throw himself off of the temple, "if you are the Son of God." In each case, Satan challenges Jesus to prove he is God's Son by using his power to escape suffering. Here Satan speaks through the human chorus, tempting Jesus to use his power to escape suffering and prove who he is. Here Christ endures the great temptation of Satan. "God has abandoned you. God does not love you. You are a nothing and a nobody. Nobody cares for you. Prove that you are God's Son and that he has not abandoned you. Come down from the cross." Jesus refuses to take the short cut to glory. Jesus lives by faith in the loving purpose of his Father and does not give into the temptation to live independent of his Father, which is the heart of evil. He conquers evil by staying on the cross.*

**The power and glory of Christ is most clearly revealed in the weakness and shame of the cross because the power of Christ over evil is displayed.**

**6.** Why did God send darkness on the land of Israel from noon to 3:00pm? CLUE: When did God send darkness in the OT? See Exodus 11:21-23, Deut. 28: 15 & 29, Amos 5: 18-22.

*Darkness, throughout the OT is associated with the outpouring of God's wrath upon sin. It is the mark or symbol of judgment, even as Jesus himself has used it in several parables in Matthew (8:12, 22:13). So here it is the symbol of God's wrath being poured out on his Son. Jesus endures hell during these three hours.*

**7.** Why does Matthew give us Jesus' cry of dereliction, his quote of Psalm 22:1, in Aramaic and then in translation?

*Matthew records this cry in Aramaic, the language that Jesus spoke and then he translates it into Greek. He does it, as John Calvin says in his commentary, "...as if he made us hear Christ himself repeating the very words which then proceeded from his mouth." Matthew wants us to fix our attention upon this cry as the heart and center of the suffering of Christ on our behalf. Jesus endured hell for us. Hell is the experience of being abandoned by God. God abandoned Jesus upon the cross as he "became sin for us." If anyone asks how God can abandon God tell them, "we don't know." We only know what we are told, which is that Jesus is forsaken by God as the just punishment due to sinners.*

**8.** What kept Jesus on the cross? See Matthew 20:28 & 26:39-44 along with John 10:14-15, 17, 12:23-24, 27 & 15:13.

*The depth of a person's love is measured by the suffering that a person is willing to undergo in order to provide aid or give a gift to the one he loves. There is no greater suffering that can be endured than the suffering that Jesus endured upon the cross. For whom did he willingly suffer this? First, he endured this suffering out of his love for his Father. This has been Matthew's point beginning back in the Garden of Gethsemane. He is doing this because it is the will of his Father and he loves his Father and does everything his Father asks of him. We see it reflected here in the cry of dereliction. He cries out to "My God." In the midst of his despair, Jesus yet knows that God is his God. While experiencing the full abandonment of God yet, he trusts God. Jesus endures this suffering out of his love for God. The Father determined before he made the world that he was going to love sinners. The Son, in order to preserve the good name of the Father,*

willingly volunteered to suffer hell for those sinners whom the Father would forgive so that God could not be accused of being a corrupt judge. The sins of every forgiven sinner have been punished in the death of Christ, so God cannot be accused of violating justice when he welcomes a guilty, hell-deserving sinner into his presence. Jesus endured this suffering out of his love for his Father.

However, the last part of v. 50 points towards his love for sinners. "He gave up his spirit." No one took his life from him. He laid it down. As he says in John 10, "...I lay down my life for the sheep. No one takes my life from me, but I lay it down of my own accord." He gave up his spirit as an offering to God for our sins. He is the sacrificial lamb upon whom the sins of all who trust in him, that is, his friends, have been placed. Everything you see Jesus endure here, especially his being abandoned by the Father is what is due to you. He endured it for everyone who trusts in him, because he loves us.

**The power and glory of Christ is most clearly revealed in the weakness and shame of the cross because the power of Christ's love is fully revealed.**

**9.** What are the things that Matthew records as happening at the death of Jesus or as a result of the death of Jesus in vv. 45 & 51-54?

It is three in the afternoon when Jesus rends the air with his blood-curdling scream and gives up his spirit. At that moment, the darkness that covered the land immediately ends. It is as though someone has turned on the lights in a dark room as the afternoon sun fills the sky with light. At the same time, an earthquake hits the land of Judea splitting rocks and opening tombs. In addition, while only a few priests observe it at the time, the curtain that separates the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies is torn in two. Finally, at the resurrection of Christ, well known, OT believers are given their resurrected bodies and they appear to select individuals in the city of Jerusalem before they are taken to heaven like Enoch and Elijah. Then Matthew tells us that the Roman centurion and his soldiers, when they saw the way Jesus died, surrounded by the mocking crowds, the darkness that covered the land suddenly turned to light and the powerful earthquake that occurred at his death, were terrified and declared, "Surely this

was the Son of God." All of these signs are pointing ahead to the radical change that has occurred with the death of Jesus.

**10.** What is the significance of each of these events? What is Matthew's point in recording each one?

- Darkness is ended: *The sudden ending of the darkness and appearance of the sun at the death of Jesus points towards the satisfaction of God's wrath by the death of Jesus. The darkness is a picture of God's wrath being placed upon the Son and the light is the sign of the benefit we receive by that death. Is this not a powerful symbol of what Christ has done by his death? He, by dying, rescues men from the darkness of Satan's kingdom, from the blindness of sin and sheds his light into our lives. We become heirs of the kingdom of light, rescued out of the kingdom of darkness, not because of anything we have done but because Christ endured the darkness of hell for us.*
- Curtain between the Holy Place and The Most Holy Place is torn in two: *This is perhaps the most powerful symbol within all of these symbols. In the temple, the Holy of Holies is the place where God said that he would dwell among his people. Only the high priest could enter it one time each year and then only after going through elaborate sacrifices. The way into the presence of God has been thrown wide open to all who will believe, not just for the high priest once a year. The curtain represents the law that separates man from God because it condemns man in his sin. Here we see how Christ's death has fulfilled the law with its sacrifices and rituals and regulations as the means by which men can approach God. Here is the physical confirmation of what Jesus said in Matthew 5:17. "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law and the Prophets. I did not come to abolish them but to fulfill them." He is the sacrifice for sin. He is the water who washes away our uncleanness. He is the priest who represents us. He is the clean food that we eat. He is the temple where we meet with God. He obeyed the moral law and so is our righteousness. He is everything that the Law required for men to know God. We don't know God or please God by submitting to these laws but by submitting to this Christ who fulfills the entire law on our behalf.*

- The earthquake: *The earthquake reminds us of the earthquake that accompanies God's appearances to his people throughout the OT. The earth shook and the rocks split when God came down on Mt. Sinai. The earth quaked when Isaiah had his vision of God in the temple. The psalmists frequently associate earthquakes with the coming of God to save his people. Psalm 68:7-8, "When you went out before your people, O God, when you marched through the wasteland, the land quaked..." God marches out to save his people in the death of his Son and this powerful earthquake marks it.*
- The appearance of resurrected OT saints in Jerusalem (Note: these people were given their glorified, resurrection bodies and appeared to certain people in Jerusalem after Jesus rose from the dead. They are now living in heaven with resurrected bodies just like Jesus, Enoch and Elijah. They are the only resurrected humans in heaven now.): *First, Matthew is making clear that every human being who is saved by God is saved by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ through faith. From Adam to the end of the human race, the only people who are going to inherit eternal life will do so by means of the death of Christ. The OT saints don't go to heaven because they kept the law but because they trusted in God's promise to send the Messiah. Jesus gave his life for all his friends, both those who lived before he came and those who have lived since. Second, Matthew wants us to know that the ultimate goal of Christ's death is that all of his people live with him forever in resurrection bodies. Finally, Matthew wants us to know that the final salvation of God is not here and now but in the future. All of the promises of God are fulfilled in and by Jesus because of his death. However, the fullness of those promises will not be experienced until that final great day when Christ returns and raises us from the dead.*
- The fear of the soldiers and confession of the centurion that Jesus "was the Son of God": *These men point ahead towards the terrified and confessing church made up of people from every tribe and tongue and language and nation. Christ appears attractive to human beings because of his death. Every converted person is terrified by the wrath of God and then experiences the comfort of knowing that the wrath due to his or her sins has been poured out*

*upon Christ. God is not angry with me because he has spent his anger against me upon his Son. This is the confession of every Christian and the confession of the church of Christ through the centuries until he comes again.*

**The power and glory of Christ is most clearly revealed in the weakness and shame of the cross because the power of Christ for the salvation of everyone who believes is exhibited.**

**12.** Does Jesus appear to you as powerful and glorious because of his crucifixion? Why or why not?