

“Truly this was the Son of God!”

Matthew 27 v 32 to 66

The crucifixion (Matthew 27 v 32 to 44)

Simon knew little if anything about Jesus, and probably had no desire to be associated with this man who was condemned to die as a criminal. Yet the Romans ruled, and Simon was not given a choice. They compelled him to carry his cross – perhaps he was chosen because he was an obvious foreigner and more conspicuous in the crowd. We have reason to believe that later Simon came to know what it really meant to take up one's cross and follow Jesus, and that his sons became leaders among the early Christians (Mark 15 v 21, Romans 16 v 13).

‘Golgotha’, in Latin ‘Calvary’ (Luke 23 v 33 KJV), means ‘Place of a Skull’, so called because it was the place where criminals were crucified. It was outside the city walls, yet on a well-established road. The hill itself may have had a skull-like appearance, as is the case with the site known as Gordon's Calvary.

- The wine mixed with myrrh offered to Jesus would have had a narcotic effect. Why did Jesus refuse it?
- What are the ironies in the charges and jeers directed against Jesus on the cross? What is the particular irony in v 42 “He saved others; he cannot save himself”?

The death of Jesus (Matthew 27 v 45 to 56)

- What is the significance of the question in verse 46? Does this question have an answer? If so, what is the answer? See Isaiah 59 v 1, 2 and Isaiah 53 v 4 to 6.

At this moment, a holy transaction took place. God the Father regarded God the Son as if He were a sinner. As the Apostle Paul would later write, God made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him (2 Corinthians 5 v 21). As terrible as the physical suffering of Jesus was, this spiritual suffering – the act of being judged for sin in our place – was what Jesus really dreaded about the cross.

This was the ‘cup’ of God’s righteous wrath (Psalm 75 v 8, Isaiah 51 v 17, Jeremiah 25 v 15). Jesus became, as it were, an enemy of God who was judged and forced to drink the cup of the Father's fury, so that we would not have to drink that cup.

- What is the significance of the temple curtain being torn in two from top to bottom (v 51)?
- In what way is the centurion’s confession (v 54) a climax to the whole of Matthew’s Gospel? Are you able to make the same confession of faith as the centurion?

The temple curtain separated the holy place from the most holy place. It was a vivid demonstration of the separation between God and man. Notably, the curtain was torn from *top to bottom*, and it was God who did the tearing.

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Jesus is buried (Matthew 27 v 57 to 61)

- Why do you think it was Joseph of Arimathea (a member of the Sanhedrin) and the women, and not the disciples, who were present when Jesus died and his body needed a tomb? What made Joseph and Nicodemus (John 19 v 39) come out into the open at this late stage?

“He rolled a great stone to the entrance of the tomb” (v 60) – this was the customary way to seal an expensive tomb. A rich man like Joseph of Arimathea probably had a tomb carved into solid rock; this tomb was in a garden near the place of crucifixion (John 19 v 41). The tomb would commonly have a small entrance and perhaps one or more compartments where bodies were laid out after being embalmed with spices, ointments, and linen strips.

The guard at the tomb (Matthew 27 v 62 to 66)

“After three days I will rise” (v 63) – isn’t it ironical that the chief priests and Pharisees (Jesus’ enemies) remembered the promise of the resurrection better than Jesus’ disciples?

“Make it as secure as you can” (v 65) – this shows that both the Jewish leaders and the Romans were well aware of the need to guard the tomb, and that they took all necessary measures to secure it. These security measures simply gave greater testimony to the miracle of the resurrection. If Jesus’ tomb was unguarded then we might not have such certainty that his body wasn’t stolen...