



Parkway Fellowship

I Wish I was There • At the Foot of the Cross • Matthew 27:45-51 • 04/22/2018

Main Point

Jesus' death and resurrection changes everything. Those who understand the implications of Jesus' death and resurrection will never be the same.

Introduction

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Think of some famous historical figures whose legacies we remember today. What did they do to leave behind a life we still recall?

How was Jesus' life different from those figures? Why do Christians and non-Christians alike still discuss His legacy today?

Throughout the course of history, many famous and influential people have left great legacies behind, making great claims about their identities along the way. In fact, many figures who went before Jesus claimed to be the Messiah, making their own valiant attempts to deliver Israel from the power of Rome. Some were even crucified on crosses, their followers scattered forever as a result. But Jesus was not just another failed savior in a long list of wannabe Messiahs. He was (and is) the Way, the Truth, and the Life, fulfilling the prophecies we read in the Old Testament and dying the ultimate death on the cross for our sins, resurrected forever to sit at the right hand of God. As a result, His death exerted influence in the heavenly realm, the spiritual realm, the earthly realm, and the relational realm throughout all of eternity.

Understanding

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| | Have a volunteer read Matthew 27:32-44

As you read through this passage, consider the different kinds of people present in various scenes. Given where they came from and what they were experiencing, what might each of them have been thinking and feeling as their paths crossed with Jesus' path?

Why do you think Matthew went into detail with regard to what people *said* to Jesus, but less about the crucifixion itself?

In this short passage, Jesus crosses paths with people from all walks of life. One served him. Some crucified him. Others mocked and derided him. At the foot of the cross, we find many people reacting to Jesus' crucifixion in a myriad of ways. No doubt you have seen people in your life react to Jesus in different ways to. No wonder Matthew went to great lengths to talk about people's responses to Jesus more than he did what people did to Jesus.

| | Have a volunteer read Matthew 27:45-51.

In his writings, Matthew sought to explain how the people could know and believe Jesus was and is the true Messiah and that God, in the flesh, had dwelt among them. Although he pointed to many significant aspects of Jesus' birth and life, we see here the distinguishing events of Jesus' death, indicating the ultimate uniqueness and truth of His claims to be the Messiah.

Of all the miracles God could have performed to draw attention to the cross, why do you think He utilized this miracle of darkness? How can we use this event to respond to claims that Jesus was just a “good man” or “moral teacher”?

Of the four miracles Matthew described surrounding Jesus' death, the first is the miracle of darkness, when the world lost light for three hours at midday—the time the sun usually shone the brightest. Matthew recorded how darkness came over the whole land from noon until three in the afternoon. God's created world reflected the dark spiritual reality of that day. As God's judgment for sin came down upon His innocent Son, everything was effected—even the light of the earth itself.

What impact does light have on darkness? What does this indicate about the miracle of darkness?

Ask a volunteer to read John 8:12. If Jesus is the Light of the world, what does that imply about the world? What does it imply about our purpose within it as followers of Jesus?

In some places in Scripture, darkness is a sign of disorder and corruption. In other places, it signals judgment and tragedy. But as much as darkness is a negative symbol in Scripture, light is a positive one. Given that Jesus is the Light of the world, then both the world and our sinful natures must naturally reside in darkness. Anyone who is drawn to the light of Jesus comes solely by the grace of God, because evil, left to its own, flees from the light. As a result, the miracle of darkness proved that Jesus was not merely a good teacher.

How did people approach God throughout the Old Testament? What role did the curtain of the temple play in this relationship? What was the significance of the temple curtain being torn at the time of Jesus' death?

The curtain of the temple separated sinful people from a Holy God. Once a year the high priest, risking his own life, passed through the curtain to make atonement for the people. But with Jesus' death, the curtain of separation was torn in two—both literally and spiritually—granting us access by faith into the grace in which we now stand as followers of Christ (see Rom. 5:2), opening the way for spiritual life. Here again we see that Jesus was not merely a religious teacher.

Application

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

As we grow with Jesus, we grow in our understanding of just how big our sin problem is, and how great His love and holiness are. How has today's conversation helped you in that regard?

What should the impact of Jesus' identity as the Light of the world have on your everyday life? What impact should it have on the role our church plays here in the community and throughout the world?

What should the grace, freedom, and joy of our lives prove about the uniqueness and credibility of Jesus' claims to be the true Messiah?

As followers of Jesus, how should our words and actions prove that Jesus was not merely good man, teacher, leader or revolutionary? How should the world view His role in our lives instead?

Pray

Thank God for His unfathomable love for us—the love that sent His only son to die the ultimate death of sin in our place, offering true freedom, deep joy, and eternal life to all who believe in and follow Him as a result. Pray for the faith to take hold of the truth of His unique life and unmatched resurrection.

Commentary

| Matthew 27:32-56

27:32. When a person was crucified, the vertical pole was already at the site of the crucifixion. The victim was forced to carry his own horizontal beam, which would be attached to the vertical pole. On the way out of the Praetorium, the soldiers realized that Jesus was too weakened from his beatings to carry the horizontal beam. They found a man named Simon from Cyrene (a Mediterranean port on the coast of modern day

Libya, in northern Africa), and they forced him to carry Jesus' crossbar to Golgotha. Simon was either a settler in the Jerusalem area, or, more likely, a pilgrim attending the Passover.

27:33–34. The soldiers brought Jesus to a hill called Golgotha, the rough Greek transliteration of its Aramaic name, which Matthew translated as The Place of the Skull. This was beside a well-traveled road where the passersby in and out of Jerusalem could see the execution of criminals.

It was customary to offer a crucifixion victim some wine before nailing him to the cross. This was a gesture of humaneness, to ease the pain. But the soldiers played one more cruel trick on Jesus, mixing gall (possibly a bitter herb) into the wine. Jesus tasted it, but was unable to take this contaminated refreshment. He refused to drink any more.

Another interpretation of this event is that the gall was a drug that deadened the pain, and that Jesus refused it. Perhaps he wanted to experience the full torture of crucifixion or he wanted his head to remain clear so he would not fall into temptation through this ordeal.

27:35–37. Matthew mentioned Jesus' actual crucifixion almost as an aside. His readers would have been much more familiar with the process than we are today. Here is what they knew about that heinous form of execution.

While Jesus hung on the cross gasping for breath, the soldiers gambled for his clothes. This was in fulfillment of the prophecy of Psalm 22:18. Then they sat down and kept watch over him, in case someone might try to rescue him. The Greek present participle of sitting and the Greek imperfect tense of kept watch communicated the duration of this ordeal.

As a deterrent to other potential criminals, a sign was always posted at the top of the cross, over the victim's head. This sign informed passersby of the crime for which the victim was being executed. Over Jesus' head was posted the charge of which he had been found guilty: this is jesus, the king of the jews.

To claim to be the king of the Jews was equivalent to claiming to be the Messiah, which the Sanhedrin had declared to be blasphemy and worthy of death. However, the charge was written by the Romans, and its intended meaning had more to do with the crime of treason or insurrection. To claim to be a king over any of the peoples in the Roman Empire was to challenge the authority of Caesar. Whenever the Romans heard of anyone claiming to be the Messiah in Israel, their greatest concern was that he might try to lead Israel in a revolt against them. Insurrection was a capital crime under Roman law.

Matthew intended us to see the irony that this dying man was not only the king of the Jews but the king of all creation. Never was there a greater contrast than that between the treatment Jesus deserved and the treatment he received. He deserved the worship of all heaven and earth, but he hung naked and beaten, laboring for each breath on an instrument of torture and shame.

27:38–44. Jesus was not alone in his suffering. Two robbers were crucified with him, one on each side. In his darkest hour, the Messiah’s company consisted of the worst outcasts of society (cf. Isa. 53:12). Many people came out to watch the spectacle, taunting and mocking the king.

The mockers used words from Psalm 22:6–8, the psalm that foretold several details of the Messiah’s suffering. The phrase, those who passed by, described the continuous stream of people, many of whom did not recognize who this was on the cross until others told them. They hurled insults at him. As they verbally abused Jesus, they were continually shaking their heads in an expression of shame (27:39).

They hurled such insults as, 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 (27:40). They did not understand that the One capable of saving himself by coming down from the cross exercised his power to stay on the cross. Love and supreme control won our salvation.

In the same way, the chief priests, the teachers of the law, and the elders mocked him, saying things like these: He saved others ... 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. They completed this insult with a reference to Jesus’ own claims, For he said, “I am the Son of God.” This taunt was an adapted quotation.

Psalm 22 is messianic. The Christ would cry out the words of the Psalm’s first verse in Matthew 27:46. Indeed, this was the Son of God, and the Father delighted in the Son, never more than at this moment (Isa. 53:10). Jesus’ deliverance would come later.

The insults came not only from below, but also from the two crosses at Jesus’ side. The two robbers also heaped insults on him.

In the midst of this physical torture, the king was immersed in the emotional strain of incessant verbal abuse. Only the sovereign king of the universe could have kept himself on the cross. Truly, he was the Almighty.

27:45. See Ex. 10:21; Deut. 28:29; and Amos 8:9. Darkness was one of the plagues on Egypt which turned into a covenant curse if God’s commands were not kept. Theologically, it was a symbol of God’s turning away from His Son as He bore the sins of the world. This personal spiritual separation, as well as the burden of all the sins of all mankind, was what Jesus feared most.

27:47-50. Some mistakenly interpret Jesus’ words as calling on the prophet Elijah, who would precede the Day of the Lord (Mal. 4:5), to come and rescue him (v. 47). One of the crowd either senses his agony or suspects incoherence and again offers a pain killer and/or thirst quencher (v. 48; recall comments under v. 34). But the rest of the crowd tells the man to stop. They want to see if Elijah will indeed appear (v. 49). Instead, Jesus cries out again and dies (v. 50). Luke 23:46 gives his words—a stunning cry of trust after his

sense of divine abandonment. “Gave up his spirit” is simply idiomatic for physical death because Jews believed that one’s spirit departed the body after one had stopped breathing. But the text may also be hinting that Jesus in his human nature chooses the moment voluntarily to relinquish his struggle for life. Even in death he is in some kind of control (cf. Luke 23:46).

27:51. The veil separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies, called the inner veil. This act by God indicated that the way was now open for all to come to God! It was torn from the top, which symbolized God’s act of removing barriers to His presence and making Himself accessible to all people.

27:52-53. The opening of the tombs was caused by the earthquake (cf. v. 54). Exactly when the people came back to life is uncertain. This resuscitation seems linked to Jesus’ resurrection (cf. v. 53). But the text seems to place the event at Jesus’ death. There is ambiguity here as to who, when, where and why.

27:54. There is no article with “son.” This implied that although this soldier was surely impressed by all that happened, he was not converted. He asserts Jesus was “a son of God,” not Lord. However, in the parallel in Luke 23:47, he is proclaiming Jesus as righteous or innocent. The irony is that this Roman soldier saw what the Jewish leaders did not (cf. v. 19; John 1:11).

This is literally “this man was a son of God.” The image of God in mankind has been restored! Intimate fellowship is again possible. However, the absence of the article does not automatically mean it is not definite (cf. Matt. 4:3, 6; 14:33; 27:43; and Luke 4:3, 9). This was a hardened Roman soldier. He had seen many men die (cf. Matt. 27:54). This may be “the focal passage” of Mark because this Gospel was specifically written to Romans. It has many Latin words and very few Old Testament quotes. Also Jewish customs and Aramaic phrases are translated and explained. Here is a Roman centurion professing faith in a crucified Jewish insurrectionist! It is possibly purposeful that passers by, chief priests, and even fellow prisoners mock Jesus, but the Roman centurion responds in affirmation and awe!

27:55-56. Mark 15:40 has a parallel list. These women were traveling companions of Jesus and the Twelve. They may have even supported Jesus and the disciples financially as well as cooking for them and meeting the needs of other women who Jesus and the Apostles ministered to.