

Title: Behold, your King!  
Text: Matthew 27.33-54  
Theme: The death of Christ  
Series: Matthew #127  
Prop Stmt. He saved others because he did not save himself.

Read Text:

This text is inexhaustible. The more that you look at it; the more you see. Every story, every account, every word that Matthew has written has been crafted to help us see our King. Over and over we have been stunned, dumbfounded as we have realized that Jesus is a King unlike any king that we have ever known. We stare in disbelief at what is before us. Who has ever seen such love, such mercy, such patience, such kindness, such meekness, such self-control, such forgiveness, such humility, such contentment, such integrity, such truthfulness, such anguish, such grief and yet such raw power? The irony is intense and purposeful.

As you saw last week, death by crucifixion was not only intended to be excruciating, it was intended to be utterly humiliating. The Son of God is hanging naked on a cross on a public road just outside of Jerusalem. Paintings and depictions add a loincloth that was not afforded to these men. Isn't that hard to hear? Isn't that offensive? It is offensive. It is confusing. This is the King. This is our King. This is our all-powerful King who appears to be completely powerless. The guards do what they always do. They start rolling dice for his clothes. They have no idea what is hanging just before them. May God grant us eyes to see what they did not.

## **1. The Irony of Shame and Glory** (38-44)

### **A. Shame**

Death is very personal. When someone you love is dying, you want to be there, no matter how difficult it may be. You want to hold their hand. You want to reassure them that they are not alone. You tell them that you love them. You try to do everything you can to make them comfortable. You stroke their cheek, put a rag on their forehead, position their hair, and straighten the sheets. You sing. You pray. You whisper. And then, when that last breath is gone, when the monitor goes flat, when the pulse is gone, you feel as if you are standing on the edge of eternity. A few seconds ago, they were with you. Now, they are gone.

Not everyone gets to die like that. Jesus didn't. It is hard to imagine a death that is more offensive and more gruesome than his. His death was personal, but not in the ways that we are used to. He was the personal recipient of about every form of humiliation and brutality that could be conceived. And here he is now, in the final hours of his life hanging on a cross between two thieves. It's not that Rome would crucify a man for stealing an apple or two. These guys were insurrectionists. They stole as part of their plot to overthrow the Romans. The word that Matthew uses for robber is the same word that John uses to describe Barabbas (18.40). They were quite possibly part of Barabbas' gang and were scheduled to die with him, but now Christ is dying in

place of him. This is no death with dignity. He was numbered with the transgressors. James and John's mother asked Jesus if her sons could be on his right and his left. This is not what she had in mind, but it is what Christ had in mind.

There were people who passed by as they walked along the road. The rulers came out to see him die and these were the ones who led the taunting, the mocking and the accusations. Their hatred had no limit. They are going to see to it that Jesus dies with their accusations ringing in his ears. He who escaped them so often will now find out, who is really in charge. Matthew says (v.39) that they derided him. That word translated derided or hurling abuse is (in the original language of the NT) the word for "blaspheme". These rulers who were able to charge Jesus with the crime of blaspheming are themselves blaspheming. This is the crime that they were able to pin on him and convince Pilate to execute him for it. This irony is like the heading and what follows, are all examples of it. All of this shame that they intended to heap upon Christ actually contributes to his glory. Even the wrath of man will bring praise to God.

## **B. Glory**

The accusations that were thrown at him in the kangaroo court earlier that day are now publicly thrown at him as he suffers and dies. The rulers want everyone around them to know what an imposter this Jesus, really is. So, the derision comes and it keeps on coming (durative force of the verb). These guys are relentless. But, ironically, everything that they accuse him of is true, but not in the way that they think or realize.

### 1) They destroyed the temple and he raised it up in three days. (40a)

They charged him with saying that he was going to destroy the Temple. He never said that. He said, "Destroy this temple and I will raise it up in three days." Christ was referring to his body when he said it, but no one at the time, including his disciples understood that. They all assumed he was speaking of the Temple. The idea that he could destroy the Temple was ridiculous. The idea that he could rebuild it in 3 days was sheer lunacy and they were not going to let him forget it. So, look! Here is the man who boasted that he had so much power that he could rebuild the Temple in 3 days. What a joke! This guy is so powerless, he can't even defend himself. He is so weak, he is going to die. Rebuild the Temple in 3 days?! What a joke! But here is the irony. The Temple was the place of sacrifice. It was the place where God dwelt with man. It was the place where God met man. And now before them was the ultimate Temple, the ultimate sacrifice and the God, in the form of man who had come to them. He was not behind a curtain any longer on the Ark of the Covenant. He was with them, and they were destroying the Temple. But, as we will see next week, their destruction of the temple of Christ's body resulted in the destruction of the Temple. For at his death, the curtain was torn from top to bottom signaling the end of the Temple era. It was over. The final sacrifice had been made. And several years later, that same Temple was destroyed and it has never been rebuilt. But, the temple they destroyed was raised up, in 3 days.

### 2) Because he was the Son of God, he could not come down from the cross. (40)

“If you are the Son of God...” Where have we heard that before? This sneering accusation was first made by Satan in chapter 4. These men are simply repeating Satan’s words right after him. That is chilling. If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross. Well, the truth is, because he was the Son of God, he could not come down from the cross, yet. But, because he was the Son of God, he will come from the cross in a way that they could never imagine.

3) The man who did not save himself saved others. (42a)

Once again these men are saying things that they do not even know are true. (42) “He saved others.” They are admitting that he did miraculous things for people. But, now they are mocking it because the man who saved others cannot save himself, it seems. The truth is, Christ did not save himself so that he could save others. His saving of others was only a preview of the ultimate salvation that he would bring. Christ saved people from sickness, from disease, from leprosy, from blindness and all sorts of infirmities. He even saved people including Lazarus from death. But all of this paled in comparison to the ultimate salvation that he brought. His death on the cross paid our debt that he might save us from our sins. Christ who saved others could not save himself or else he could not save others. It was his refusal to save himself, but rather to offer himself that purchased our pardon.

They accused him of not being able to save himself. Again, there is truth to that. Christ could not save himself since he was committed to accomplishing the Father’s will. So, no, he could not save himself and fulfill his mission. There are more.

4) The man who was mocked as King, is King. (42b)

5) We believe in him because he did not come down from the cross.

This is a double irony. First of all, if Christ did come down from the cross, they would not have believed him. They refused to believe all of the other overwhelming evidences of his deity and their attempts to cover-up his resurrection simply reinforce this. They would not believe him. But, we do! We believe Christ because he did not come down from the cross.

6) He trusted in God to deliver us by not delivering him. (43)

To these men, the proof of Christ’s condemnation by God was seen in the fact that Christ was not delivered from death by God. If Christ was really the Son of God, as he claimed, then surely God would deliver Christ from death. But, since Christ wasn’t, as they claimed, then, they were proven correct by God’s refusal to deliver Christ. After all, what kind of Father would allow his own Son to endure such torture and humiliation, when it was in his power to deliver him?

To them, Christ was an imposter. Christ was delusional to think that he was the Son of God. But again, the irony is that Christ did trust the Father. And he trusted in God to deliver us from our sin, by not delivering Christ from death. And yet, by not delivering Christ from the cross, Christ was delivered through the cross and through the cross, he accomplished our deliverance as well.

How are we rescued from our sin? We are rescued by believing in who Christ is and in what he

has done. We summarize by saying that we are saved by faith alone in Christ alone. That is called "saving faith". But what did Christ do? He suffered the most extreme form of injustice possible. We are saved because God turned the worst injustice into our greatest rescue.

How do we grow as followers of Christ? We grow by our continual belief and application of the gospel. We live in view of who Christ is and what he has done. That is called "sanctifying faith." Sanctifying faith is a faith that perseveres. It endures because it is rooted in the ultimate reality that since God turned the worst injustice ever into our greatest rescue, that he is going to turn every injustice in my life into a means for my good. You live in a world full of adversity. You live not only with adversity in a general sense, but you live with actual enemies. Think of what some of your adversities are right now. They may be the effects of age on your body, they may be a family member, they may be an unresolved issue, etc. For some of you, they may be a major injustice that you have experienced. Get it in view.

Now compare your injustice to what Christ experienced. But I am not asking you to see the fact that he endured so much more so that you will stop whining about yours. That's not it. Look at what God did through what Christ endured. By means of the cross, God took the worst injustice and turned it inside out and upside down. He used it for our rescue. God loves to take the enemies of our soul and the weapons of adversity that are formed and fashioned for our demise and turn them into tools for our sanctification.

Sanctifying faith (faith that helps me grow into looking more like Jesus) is believing, anticipating that God will use every adversity in my life for my good and his glory, for my joy and for his purpose. So that, even in the adversity, I can stand on my tiptoes in anticipation of how he is going to pull this off. The irony of the cross is not only for our salvation; it is for our sanctification. The irony affects us for salvation and marks us in our life. The irony is that God through the weakness of Christ accomplished our salvation and proved his strength. So too, when we are weak, we are strong. When we are last, we are first. The meek inherit the earth and the humble get the kingdom of God.

So, what is the adversity that you are tempted to hate, resist and run from? Embrace it, not because you like it. Embrace it because you are convinced that God is accomplishing something far greater through it.

## **2. The Irony of God forsaken by God.** (45-50)

It was the third hour when they crucified him. (9am) At noon, darkness came over the entire land, until 3pm. Darkness was a sign of judgment. The earth was being judged because her king was being judged. Those three hours were without a doubt, the worst three hours of eternity. Around 3pm, Christ cried out, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani; which means, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Apparently some misunderstood what he was saying. Christ was quoting Psalm 22.1 in the Aramaic language. Eloi, Eloi sounded like Elijah, so some assumed he was calling upon Elijah to come rescue him, since it was a common view that Elijah, the prophet would return to Israel as a forerunner to the Messiah. (Malachi 4.5) Earlier in his ministry Christ acknowledged this and pointed out that John the Baptist had fulfilled that prophecy. But, here on the cross, some thought that Christ was calling for Elijah. What was he saying?

This cry of Christ from the cross was confusing to those who heard it then, and certainly has a level of mystery to us today. Some accuse Christ of losing his faith in the Father or that Christ was only saying what he felt at the moment. I do not agree with either one of those. There is so much about the relationship of the Father, Son and Spirit that we do not yet grasp and will for eternity learn in awe and wonder. So, I do not pretend to understand everything that is going on between Christ and the Father at this moment, but this much is clear. Christ was forsaken because Christ was truly condemned.

In order for you to begin to understand this, you have to realize the seriousness of sin. Do you remember Christ's pleading with the Father in the garden to take the cup of wrath from him? We learned that the cup was the cup of God's wrath against our sin. God has demonstrated that He is an infinitely holy God. His love is infinite and so is His wrath. It is true that God loves to be known as a God who in wrath remembers mercy. He is a God who is slow to anger, but slowness to anger does not mean the absence of anger. His righteous anger most assuredly can be aroused, and when it is, it is terrifying. God once flooded the entire world, and rescued one family to demonstrate that His Word will not be mocked. He incinerated Sodom and Gomorrah when he could no longer forbear their sin. God judged the Canaanites, then the Israelites, then the Assyrians and Babylonians as a fulfillment of His Word against people who live in defiance to Him. His wrath is severe.

This cup represents the wrath of God against sin and Christ is now the recipient of the wrath of God. So, when the Psalmist says that "*there is a cup with foaming wine, well mixed and he pours out from it, and all the wicked of the earth shall drain it down to the dregs*" Christ has now become the wicked of the earth and he is draining it down to the dregs. This means that Christ is considered as being guilty before God. This is something that He has never experienced. He has always been the Son who has received the life of and the love of and the joy and the delight of the Father and now He is seen as and treated as the enemy, the one who is offensive, the one cursed, the one damned, the one abandoned.

Paul said, "He became sin." (2 Cor. 5.21) Can you imagine? We are sinners. We are used to it. Yet, even we can become burdened, wearied with, crushed, hopeless and buried by our sin. In that moment, he took it all. He took your rebellion. He took your pride. He took your lust. He took your insecurity. He took your fear. He took your broken promises and other lies. He took your shallowness, and all of your self-worship. He entered into a condition that he had never experienced before. He, God, was under the judgment of God. He, the innocent, was now counted as guilty. He, the pure, was now defiled, unclean, and viewed as perverse. That, I am convinced was the greatest sorrow of Christ, which is why the gospel writers do not hone in on the details of a crucifixion.

I take these words in a straightforward manner. What Christ cried out was an accurate reflection of reality. He was God, forsaken by God. His faith was not faltering. He was not experiencing a weakened moment of doubt. He was now forsaken, abandoned by God. Christ trembled before accepting the cup of God's wrath in the garden. He knew what that meant. But, once he accepted it, he accepted it and all that came with it. The accusations that were now made against him had a measure of truth to them. The Pharisees who jeered that he who trusted in God so much, let's see

if God saves him now, were saying that God couldn't save him or wouldn't save him. The truth is, God could not save him from this death and save us from our sin. God had made the decision to save us by not sparing His Son. I want to emphasize this again. Christ died for us because the Father loves us. "For God so loved the world that he sent his one and only Son..." (John 3.16) We look at the cross and realize that Christ loves us, and he does. But Christ is fulfilling the plan of the Father because Christ loves the Father who loves us. Christ chose to become sin for us and chose to experience the infinite wrath of God and judgment of God for our sin so the Father would not pour it out on us.

In that sense Christ went through hell for us. Hell is a literal place of torment, but even worse than that, hell is a place of abandonment of the love of God. After Christ died, he did not go to hell in order to complete the suffering necessary for our sin. That payment was made in full and complete on the cross. But, Christ did experience that aspect of hell, in that he experienced the abandonment of the Father's love, (and I would suggest that of the Spirit as well). Could this be why My God is repeated? Is it more than just a statement for emphasis? This was more than just physical darkness. He was alone, as no one has ever experienced aloneness on this earth. He was utterly forsaken by God. This was a torment of his soul that made the torment to his body pale in comparison.

But even though Christ was God, forsaken by God, He never for a split second ceased being God, and because He has always been and will forever be God, the Trinity, never stopped being the Trinity. But in the relationship that God enjoys as God, the Godhead experienced something that had never happened before and will never happen again. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Person of the Trinity was under the formal and personal condemnation of the Father. And because the Son was God, He experienced a closeness and a unity that, apart from the Spirit is unparalleled in its perfection, happiness, intensity and security. The highest of relationships now experienced the deepest estrangement. The brightest unity now experienced the darkest abandonment. At that moment, God was indeed damned by God. I do not have words for this. It really is astounding to consider the totality of our sin all resting upon the God-man at one time. He was crushed by our iniquities. This is what Christ foresaw when he looked into the cup. This is what he wanted to avoid, but didn't. And he died alone, abandoned and forsaken, so that you would never, ever be.

Joe Simpson and Simon Yates were climbing a 21,000 ft. mountain in Peru. About halfway up Joe fell and crushed the bones in his right leg. Simon tried to rescue his friend but the situation was very dangerous. Simon tried to lower Joe down the side of the mountain with a rope, but Joe's weight threatened to take them both down. So, Simon did the unimaginable, he cut the rope and watched as his friend fell to his death into the darkness of a large crevasse and then Simon returned to the base camp. But what Simon did not know, is that Joe did not die. He survived the fall and spent the next three and a half days inching his way down the mountain. It is a remarkable story. Joe had neither food nor water. Every movement brought excruciating pain, and yet he kept going. Later he wrote about his experience and said this about why he kept going. "What was terrible was knowing I was going to die alone. I've never got over it and I don't think I ever will. When I had accepted in my heart that I going to die, why did I keep crawling over those rocks, causing myself so much pain? I'm sure it was because if I was going to die, I wanted someone to hold me. And for a rough, tough mountaineer, that was a pathetic thing to be left with, wasn't it?"

When Christ cried out “why”, was He looking for an answer? Was He questioning the just wrath of God that was being poured out upon His soul and body unto death? Was he confused and wondering why it had to be this way? No, Christ knew the answer to the question before he uttered it. So, why did He ask it? Well, it was an accurate reflection of the reality. But also, Christ was meditating on Psalm 22. He quoted the first verse because He was fulfilling the Psalm. He asked the question because that is how the Psalm is written. It is incredible to consider that even when Christ was dying for us, he was living for us. Even in his death he was fulfilling all righteousness. As he died, he meditated on God’s Word. Even though condemned, he was faithful, in my place. Even in despair, he trusted God. Yes, God, was forsaken by God, so that we would never be alone. Sanctifying faith is being convinced that God will turn the weapons of adversity into tools for our good. But we do not believe that perfectly, do we? But Christ did for us. So, even as we seek to be faithful in our believing, we keep looking to Christ.

And then our text concludes by saying, “And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit.” (50) I said at the beginning that our all-powerful king appears to be powerless, but he really isn’t, is he? Death by crucifixion was death by asphyxiation. The one being crucified was caught between two agonizing choices: the pain of suffocation or the pain of the nails. When the victim was so exhausted that he could not pull his weight up in order to grasp a breath, he then died. It was truly awful. The last hours of life were spent gasping for air. Every ounce of energy was spent on trying to get a breath. But I don’t think Christ died that way. Matthew says that he cried out. He had to have enough oxygen in his lungs to do more than survive. He was able to cry a loud. He was able to announce the accomplishment of his mission. Matthew says pointedly that he cried out with a loud voice. A man on the cross who has enough energy to cry out with a loud voice is still a long ways away from dying from exhaustion. Christ did not die from exhaustion. He died from completion. No one took his life. He laid it down and when he was done, he yielded up his spirit. He gave himself over to the Father because he fully trusted in God, all the way to the end.

Joe was asked what he would have done if the tables were turned. If Simon had smashed his leg, what would Joe have done? Joe said, “Simon put his life at risk to save mine, and then got in a situation where he knew he was likely to die. No-one you know – or will ever know – will die for someone else in those circumstances.” Aren’t you grateful that Joe is wrong?

Two more things for you to chew on:

- 1) The death of Christ was and is powerful enough to forgive you from all your sin. When you realize your sin, you need to realize that.
- 2) The death of Christ was and is powerful enough to keep you from falling into the sin. When you are tempted, you need to realize that. The Savior who rescues you is strong enough to keep you from going back.