

The Power of the Cross

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Date: 20 April 2014

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[0 : 00] I want you to take your Bibles and turn, if you would, to Matthew chapter 27 and find verse 11.

I'm going to be reading a somewhat lengthy text, verses 11 through 54, though we're going to focus really on the last few verses of this text.

Matthew 27, verses 11 through 54. And again, our focus this morning in the sermon is the cross, is the power of the cross, the saving power of the cross of Jesus Christ.

And so listen as I read these verses, verses 11 through 54. Of course, this takes place after Jesus' arrest and kind of his mock trial.

And verse 11 says, now Jesus stood before the governor. That would be Pilate, of course. And the governor asked him, saying, are you the king of the Jews?

[1 : 10] Jesus said to him, it is as you say. And while he was being accused by the chief priests and elders, he answered nothing.

Then Pilate said to him, do you not hear how many things they testify against you? But he answered him, not one word. So that the governor marveled greatly.

Now at the feast of the governor was accustomed, the feast the governor was accustomed to releasing to the multitude one prisoner whom they wished. And at that time they had a notorious prisoner called Barabbas.

Therefore, when they had gathered together, Pilate said to them, whom do you want me to release to you? Barabbas or Jesus, who is called Christ?

For he knew that they had handed him over because of envy. And while he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent to him, saying, have nothing to do with that just man, for I have suffered many things today in a dream because of him.

[2 : 17] But the chief priests and elders persuaded the multitudes that they should ask for Barabbas and destroy Jesus. The governor answered and said to them, which of the two do you want me to release to you?

They said, Barabbas. Pilate said to them, what then shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ? They all said to him, let him be crucified.

Then the governor said, why? What evil has he done? But they cried out all the more, saying, let him be crucified.

When Pilate saw that he could not prevail at all, but rather that a tumult was arising, he took water and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just man, this just person, you see to it.

And all the people answered and said, his blood be on us and on our children. Then he released Barabbas to them, and when he had scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified.

[3 : 27] Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the praetorium and gathered the whole garrison around him. And they stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him.

When they had twisted a crown of thorns, they put it on his head and a reed in his right hand. And they bowed the knee before him and mocked him, saying, hail, king of the Jews.

Then they spat on him, and they took the reed and struck him on the head. And when they had mocked him, they took the robe off him, but put his own clothes on him and led him away to be crucified.

As they came out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name. Him they compelled to bear his cross. And when they had come to a place called Golgotha, that is to say, place of a skull, they gave him sour wine mingled with gall to drink.

But when he had tasted it, he would not drink. Then they crucified him, divided his garments, casting lots that it might be fulfilled, which was spoken by the prophet.

[4 : 37] They divided my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots. Sitting down, they kept watch over him there. And they put up over his head the accusation written against him, this is Jesus, the king of the Jews.

Then two robbers were crucified with him, one on the right and another on the left. And those who passed by blasphemed him, wagging their heads and saying, You who destroy the temple and build it up in three days, save yourself.

If you are the son of God, come down from the cross. Likewise, the chief priests also mocked with the scribes and elders said, He saved others himself he cannot save.

If he is the king of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him. He trusted in God, let him deliver him now, if he will have him.

For he said, I am the son of God. Even the robbers who were crucified with him reviled him with the same thing. Now from the sixth hour until the ninth hour, there was darkness over all the land.

[5 : 53] At about the ninth hour, Jesus cried out with a loud voice saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani. That is, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Some of those who stood there when they heard that said, This man is calling for Elijah.

Immediately one of them ran and took a sponge, filled it with sour wine, and put it on a reed, and offered it to him to drink.

The rest said, Let him alone. Let us see if Elijah will come to save him. Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit. Then, behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom, and the earth quaked, and the rocks were split, and the graves were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, and coming out of the graves after his resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many.

So when the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and the things that had happened, they feared greatly, saying, Truly, this was the Son of God.

If you consider the various people who were present there at the crucifixion of Jesus, I think you don't have to really think very hard to see that many of them represent mankind one way or another.

[7 : 25] For example, the Bible here, Matthew mentions, and the other gospel accounts mention these passers-by. They were there at the cross, and they walked by, and they spoke things, and said things, and observed, and so forth.

And so there were many who were walking by the cross of Christ. They were present there that day. And when you consider that group, you consider those whose religion is really just one of, what can I get from God?

It's a weird kind of group, because they were there for the Passover, the Passover feast, and so that's why they were in the city. Many of them had traveled some distance to arrive there.

And just a few days before, they were the ones who were laying down on the road, their coats and pieces of clothing as Jesus was entering in riding on a donkey.

And they were the ones who were shouting with great enthusiasm, Hosanna to the King. And yet just a few days after that, many of these same people were shouting with equal enthusiasm, away with Him.

[8 : 42] Crucify Him. We have no king but Caesar. And so I say to you that these people represent people living today, those who turn to God only for what they think they can get from God.

And so they walk an aisle, and they make a certain profession, and they join a church, and so forth. And yet, when things don't turn out the way they thought they should, or wanted them to, then they make a very quick reversal, you know, from my King Jesus, to away with Him.

And then there were the Jewish leadership there that day. Many of them were there to witness the crucifixion of Jesus. I don't think they were normally there when crucifixions took place, but they were certainly not going to miss this crucifixion, because it was of this blasphemer, quote, blasphemer.

At least that's what they thought. And so the Jewish leadership were there. And so they represent a group of people, a very large group of people, who have lived over the centuries, and many still living today.

They represent those who are committed to a religion, but it is a Christless religion. Their religion is one of form, ritual, one that is only duty, out of duty, without any real relationship, without any real

substance.

[10:16] So the Jewish leadership, they certainly represent that group of people, a very large group of people living today. Because even in Bible-believing evangelical churches, there are these kinds of people on the church rolls, who attend church, they sing hymns, they pray prayers, they tithe their money, but they have no real relationship with Christ.

They have never really submitted to Him as their Lord. And then, of course, we have the thieves hanging there on the cross, one on each side of Jesus.

At first, the Bible tells us, in other accounts, gospel accounts, that both, in fact, here Matthew says, that both were reviling Him, or insulting Him, criticizing Him.

Of course, one of them later believes, but there's this one, of course, who is reviling Jesus, and he says, if you really are the Christ, save yourself.

That is, prove it to us. And then while you're at it, save us too. He was saying to Jesus, save me. Now that sounds like a pretty good thing to say.

[11:30] Right kind of response. But of course, this man did not mean, forgive me, save me in any spiritual sin, sense of the word, or eternal sense of the word, but rather, he is saying, save me, that is, in the sense of deliver me, from this current situation.

A lot of people like that, who have had so-called salvation experiences, or conversion experiences, but it really was just simply that Jesus, they thought, delivered them from some hard thing, some life-threatening situation, or some difficult times.

And that's not salvation. You see, their only real concern, just like this thief on the cross, their only real concern is that Jesus get them out of some jam they're in. And so when you ask them about their conversion experience, they refer, immediately refer back, to a time when they, when Jesus, quote, came through for them, end quote.

Now, having considered these three, representations, of people who live today, you may, or you may not, and hopefully not, relate to them, in any particular way.

But there is one person, who was there that day, that I really believe, we can all relate to, and should relate to. And I'm talking about the one, who was directly responsible, for the crucifixion of Jesus.

[13:04] I'm of course talking about, the Roman centurion, very important man, in the Roman army, the leader of a hundred soldiers, this particular centurion, and his, his soldiers under him, were part of the temple police, responsible for the very things, that we've just been reading about, here in Matthew chapter 27.

So it's this Roman centurion, I'm saying that we can relate to. And I say, that he represents me. He represents me.

And he may, represent you as well. I hope he does. He was a Gentile. As we are.

And he came to the cross, that particular day, the cross of Christ. He came there as a sinner. A pagan. An unbeliever.

But he left that day, saved. He left that day, a believer. Because he came to faith there, at the foot of the cross, the cross of Jesus Christ.

[14:17] And so, he is our focus this morning. Who he was, and what he did, represents us. In three ways.

Three ways. First, his tyranny. His tyranny against Jesus. He represents us in that.

Now again, I believe that this Roman soldier, this Roman centurion, and possibly, even some, that were, there with him, or under his authority. Though, really, Luke tells us, it was just the centurion. So that's why I want to just focus upon him. I believe that he was saved there, that day, at the foot of the cross of Jesus. And I can identify with that, because, I too was saved, by the one who bled and died, there upon that cross.

Many of you can say the same thing. So I can relate to that. I can identify, with him. But, listen to me. I can also identify, with this centurion, before he was saved.

[15:21] Before he became a believer. He was, I was, you were, by the way, we all were, enemies of God the Son, before he saved us, by his grace.

We were his enemies. Bible tells us that, in a number of places. For example, James 4, and verse 4, James declares, do you not know, that friendship, with the world, is enmity, with God.

That is hostility, with God. Friendship, with the world, he's describing, an unbeliever. We're enemies, of God. Whoever, therefore, wants to be a friend, of the world, makes himself, an enemy

of God.

That's what James says. Paul, in Romans chapter 8, verse 7, the carnal mind, and that's a description, of an unbeliever. The carnal mind, that is the mind, that is set, solely upon the flesh, and not the spirit, not upon God, just self, and the world, the flesh.

The carnal mind, is hostile, to God. It is, at enmity, with God. For it does not, subject itself, to the law of God, for it is not, even able, to do so.

[16:33] It's an unsaved person, enemy. Now, do you understand, before God, by his grace, saved me, I was capable, of the same, tyrannical, acts of cruelty, that this Roman centurion, perpetrated, inflicted, upon the Lord, Jesus Christ.

See, it's not beyond, reasonable conjecture, that this Roman, Roman centurion, this commander, of 100 soldiers, was given charge, over, first of all, I think, the arrest of Jesus, there at the garden. And then, he was in charge, and watched over, the scourging of Jesus. And then, he was in charge, I think, of the abuse, that was inflicted, upon Jesus, by the temple guards.

When they, put that crown, upon his head, and they, put a mock reed, in his hand, and a robe, around his back, and they, taunted him, and they, they, they, they blasphemed him, and hit him, and spat on him.

This Roman, centurion, was in charge of that, and, and permitting that. And finally, I think, obviously, he was in charge, of the crucifixion. He was the centurion, in charge.

[17:44] And he may have been, one of those, that was there, at the foot of the cross, casting lots, kind of rolling the dice, so to speak, for the personal possessions, of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Right there, at the foot, of the cross, as Jesus hung there, bled, and died. The tyranny, the cruelty, the cruelty, the cruelty against, this innocent man.

Now, now, now listen to me. We need to, apply that here, because we need to see ourselves, in this Roman centurion. You and I, must identify with him.

Now, we want to separate ourselves, from him, don't we? In fact, in our, kind of, piety, we want to react, with outrage, at what he did.

But, when I look at that, Roman centurion, when I focus in, upon his face, when I notice, then, that it is my face, that I see, there, it is me, I'm looking at.

[18:52] And, to my horror, I look, and see, that I, am the one, holding the hammer, that nailed, those nails, that pierced, the hands, and feet, of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I see myself, there. His tyranny, my, tyranny, through my sin. second, consider, his, terror. His terror.

Look, look again, at verse 54. So, when the centurion, and those with him, who were guarding Jesus, saw the earthquake, and the things, that had happened, the other things, that, phenomena, that were taking place, they, feared, greatly.

Now, in English, that, not really, all that profound. They feared, greatly. They were afraid. The word, feared, is the Greek word, phabao.

[20:05] We get our word, phobia, from it. Fear, kind of ongoing fear. A, a regular kind of fear, toward a certain thing, or whatever.

But, even that, is a little bit soft, in our own language. But, when you, take that word, in the Greek, and then you add to it, the adverb, greatly, as, as Matthew did, as the Bible does, it, it, then, brings out, a much fuller meaning.

And, the meaning, then, is sheer terror. In fact, some verses, some translations, I think, use the word, terrified. Sheer terror.

I, I, think about it, this battle-hardened centurion, the very backbone, of the Roman army, career soldier. And, those soldiers with him. They were suddenly, filled, with, uncontrollable terror, as they saw, and heard, the things, that were taking place, after Jesus, was crucified.

The terror. It's interesting, by the way, to note, that, other instances, where you find, these two words, combined together, in the Greek New Testament, it is always, these words, are always used, to describe, man's reaction, to the supernatural, activity of God.

[21:27] For example, Jesus walked, on the water, remember, and the disciples, were in the boat, out in the sea, of Galilee, and it was a stormy sea, and they were afraid, just by that, they thought they were, going to lose their lives, and then Jesus, of course, comes to them, walking on the water.

They didn't recognize him, at first, they thought he was, some kind of, some kind of ghost, or spirit, but the Bible says, that they feared greatly, that is, they were filled, with terror.

And then, another instance, when Peter, James, and John, were invited by Jesus, to go up, the mount of transfiguration, remember, and Jesus, was then transfigured, before them, that is, the outshining, of his glory, the glory, came on the outside, and he was dramatically, changed, before them, and the Bible says, that they feared, greatly, they were terrified, and that's what was going on, with this centurion, was terrified, you see, this centurion, and his soldiers, encountered, this supernatural, activity of God, I'm talking about, the sudden darkness, that, that closed in, all around them, it was a thick darkness, at noontime, as that happened, and that occurred, and the earthquake, that shook the ground, and split the rocks, you see, this centurion, for the first time, in his life, encountered the reality, of almighty God, and, understand something, this darkness, at noontime, the earthquake, that split rocks, all, all, of these things, symbolized, the wrath of God, the judgment of God, even these pagans, would have understood that, that was a part, of their belief system, that when their gods, were angry, it was manifested, by darkness, and, and the rumbling, of the ground, earthquakes, and so forth, catastrophic, kind of events, they would have made, that same association, even in their own, pagan way of thinking, and so they understood that, so the darkness, at noontime, symbolized God's judgment, and they understood that, they understood also, that it was being, concentrated, upon that one man, who hung upon that cross, the center cross, between two thieves, it was focused, and concentrated, directly upon him, because they heard, that man, that man named Jesus, say, actually ask a question, of God, why have you, forsaken me, they were there, they heard not only, those words, but they also, witnessed, God's answer, to the question, the darkness, the earthquake, the judgment, of God, being focused, upon that one man, not for his sin, of course, but for ours, the terror, in our, unregenerate, state, before, being born again, we fear, the judgment, of almighty God, we fear, death, we fear, hell, we fear, judgment, we fear, what we know, in our heart of hearts, we deserve, for our sin, but of course, fear, is not salvation, is it, was not for this centurion, and it certainly, is not for us, Proverbs 1, 7, says, the fear of the Lord, is the beginning, of wisdom, the beginning, of now, and so you see, this centurion, the centurion's, tyranny, perpetrated, against the Lord, of glory, gave way, to terror, gave way to terror, it reminded him, suddenly, of his own, sinfulness, can you see him, focus in, on that centurion, can you see him,

I see him, he looks like me, he is me, and again, in my hand, is the hammer, that nailed Jesus, to that cross, my sin, that made the cross, absolutely, necessary, the only answer, then finally, his trust, his trust, we really have to bring, all of the gospel accounts, together, Luke, mentions this, Mark, Matthew, I've already said, the synoptic gospels, give the account, of this centurion, Luke focuses, just simply, on the centurion, he put all that together, so they're clear, that this centurion, this Roman soldier, this pagan, came to the cross, a sinner, an unbeliever, a pagan, but, he came to faith, there, at the foot of the cross, his trust, so his tyranny, gave way to terror, which God, graciously used, to bring him, to trust, to faith, he said, truly, this, was the son of God,

[26 : 49] Matthew, records in, verse 51, I read it, a moment ago, that immediately, after Jesus, yielded up his spirit, that the veil, of the temple, was torn, into, from top, to bottom, now what is all that about, well, the veil, the veil in the temple, a very thick curtain, kind of partition, and you, many of you know this, it was, it served as a, kind of a wall, a barrier, between the holy place, in the inner temple, and the holy of holies, the holiest of holies, and it was a very thick, veil, curtain, very thick, as a matter of fact, and it barred the way, into the holy of holies, because only one man, was allowed to go, into the holy of holies, and then only one time, a year, that would be the high priest, and when he would enter, through the holy of holies, the thing he would see there, would be the ark, of the covenant, you remember the ark, of the covenant, from the old testament, and inside the ark, of the covenant, are the two tablets, of the law, and a few other articles, that are significant, especially the, tablets of the law, the top of the ark, of the covenant, there's a lid, it's called the mercy seat, and so the high priest, on the day of atonement, one time a year, and that only after, he had gone through, quite an extensive, ritual cleansing, after the lamb, had been sacrificed, the spotless lamb, and the blood, collected in the laver, then the high priest, would bring the blood, of the spotless lamb, into the, through the veil, into the holy of holies, and then he would take, hyssop, which I think is, symbolic of faith, dipped it in that blood, and then he would, sprinkle it, on the mercy seat, that covering, the lid, on the top, of the ark, of the covenant, in which contained, the law, so you see, what the blood, accomplished, it accomplished, forgiveness, forgiveness, for lawbreakers, for that one year, and it made atonement, for the sins of Israel, for that one year, and you know, the high priest, was the only one, allowed to go in there, you know,

I could not go there, and then, only one time a year, and so he would then, go through the veil, into the holy of holies, which represented, the very presence, of God, and also access, to God, and he would there, meet with God, for the people, on behalf of the people, and he would present, then the blood, that would atone, for their sins, all right, now that's, what, the veil, was, what it served, the holy of holies, the ark, the covenant, and the blood, and all that, part of the, ritual, the, the ceremonial ritual, there's all, by the way, been abolished now, and, because it was just, a shadow, of the real, and the real, is Jesus, of course, and so Jesus flesh, this is what we need, to understand, his body, his flesh, represented the veil, the veil, and so when Jesus flesh, was torn, on the cross, the nails, piercing his hands, the nails, piercing his feet, the spear, piercing his side, the thorns, piercing the skin, of his brow, his head, and, when his flesh, was torn, at the cross, the veil, in the temple, was torn, torn in two, from top, to bottom, thereby, opening the way, for believers, to come, to come directly, to God, and again, by the way, that's what this day, this day we call, most call Easter, resurrection, that's what this day, proved, is all about, the resurrection, proved, the validity, the sufficiency, of the, torn flesh, and the, shedding of the blood, of the Lord Jesus Christ, because Jesus, sacrificed himself, upon the cross, he shed, his sinless blood, there upon that cross, as an atonement, for our sin, and he then, offered that blood, to God the Father, as full payment, for our sins, and God accepted it, praise the Lord, he accepted it, as full payment, for your sin, and my sin, no more sacrifice, has to be made, once, and for all, Jesus, sacrificed, his body, and blood, and God, accepted it, and to prove it, he raised Jesus, from the dead, he lives, as proof, of the sufficiency, the acceptability, of the cross, and the blood, that was shed, there for us, praise the Lord, and who, was the first one, to step, through, this new access, to God, this Roman centurion, this Gentile, you see, three reactions, to Jesus, to the cross, the tyranny, at the cross, the cross, is about sin, not Jesus sin, but our sin, our sin, that made the cross, absolutely necessary, there was no other way, for a holy God, to forgive us, of our sins, the just, to be the just, justifier, the cross, was all about sin, our sin, the terror, at the cross, also, the cross, is about, it's about, it's about judgment, our judgment, that was laid upon Jesus, and Jesus willingly took, the trust at the cross, the cross is about faith, and forgiveness, our forgiveness, the Bible says, that Jesus, spoke seven times, from the cross, you probably have heard, sermons, on those seven sayings, of Jesus, while he was hanging, upon the cross, and each one of them, are significant, very significant, spiritually significant, very instructive, and, I would say to you, that the centurion there, heard all of those things, he heard everything, that Jesus said, from the cross, but I think the clincher for him, was when Jesus said, Father, forgive them, for they do not know, what they do, that was the clincher for him, now Luke is the only one, who records those words, interesting, and Luke used, a certain verb, form of the word, said, Jesus said, and it's a, verb of, continuous action, you've heard me mention that, a number of times, about Greek verbs, continuous action, and that's amazing, when you think about, the implication of that, because, that means that, Jesus literally, kept on saying, Father, forgive them, wow, I mean, as they led him up that hill, to the top of Golgotha, the place of the skull, as they led him up there, he could barely walk, in fact, he could not even carry, his own cross, at some point, and they, they commissioned someone else, to step in and carry it, he was bleeding, he had been whipped, to the very edge, of death itself, so he had lost, a lot of blood, and he was weak, and, and they led him, up that hill, and I think he was saying, as he walked, to the top of that hill, Father, forgive them, they don't know, what they do, and then when they got up there, they ripped his clothes off, by then, I'm sure that the blood, from the scourging, had kind of dried, and, and melded, with the clothing, that he was wearing, and so they ripped, the clothing off, opening those wounds, once again, and you can imagine, the, the pain of that, and he said, Father, forgive them, and they threw him down, his back down, upon that, that rough piece of timber, Father, forgive them, they do not know, what they're doing, and when they took those spikes, and that hammer, and they nailed, those nails, through his hands, and through his feet, Father, forgive them, as they raised, that cross, up, and let it slide down, into that hole, with a jolt, every nerve, in his body, is crying out, with severe pain, and yet he says,

[36 : 31] Father, forgive them, they don't know, what they're doing, and as they, taunted him, hurled, insults, at him, Father, forgive them, and as, the soldiers, were there, at the foot of the cross, and, casting lots, for his personal possessions, his clothing, his robe, Father, forgive them, they don't know, what they're doing, they don't know, see, this centurion, I'm sure, he had conducted, hundreds of crucifixions, in his career, as a soldier, but this one, was different, and he took note, of that, you see, I really believe, that, as he watched, the blood, flowing out, of the body,

of Jesus, the very, his very life blood, flowing from his body, flowing, from the man, that he had just, this centurion, had just, mocked, and abused, and crucified,

I believe, he heard Jesus say, Father, forgive him, for he does not know, what he's doing, I think, it's at that very moment, at that very moment, that the truth, of the gospel, broke through, to this centurion's heart, by the grace of God, and he, then, according to Luke's account, and I love Luke's, Luke's account, Luke says, that he glorified God, he glorified God, and said, truly, this man, is the son of God, he was saved, his trust, and the people, if, Jesus can have compassion, and, grant forgiveness, to the, man who killed him, put him to death, and he can forgive you, he can forgive you, when you turn to him, trust him, and glorify him,