

# The Gospel of Matthew

## Lesson 13

### The Suffering, Death, Burial and Resurrection of the King

#### Matthew 27:26-28:1-20

##### Outline of these Chapters:

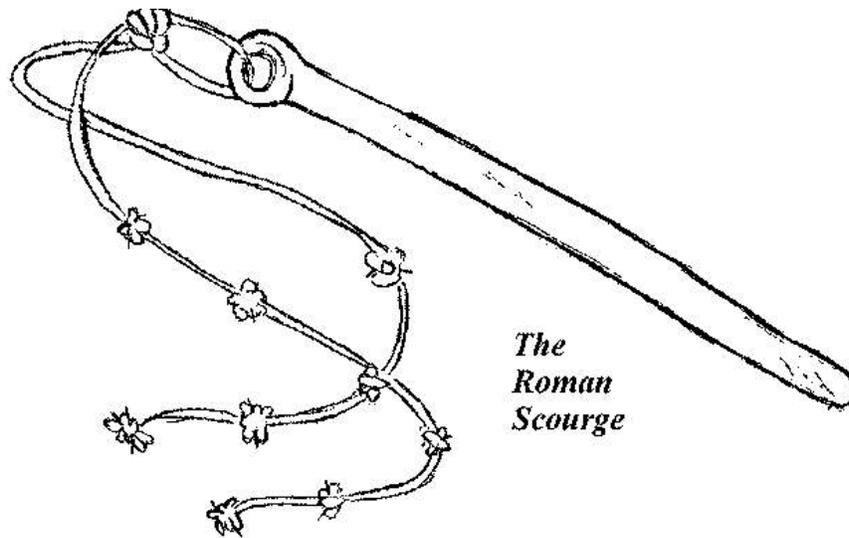
- 1A. The Mistreatment of the King (Matthew 27:26-32)
- 2A. The Death of the King—The First Three Hours (Matthew 27:33-44)
- 3A. The Death of the King—The Last Three Hours (Matthew 27:45-50)
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##### The Mistreatment of the King (Matthew 27:26-32)

Beginning in Matthew 27:26 and continuing through verse 44, the teacher and students can make a list of all the things that were maliciously done to Christ, either physically or verbally.

The Roman scourge is mentioned in verse 26. This consisted of a short wooden handle to which several thongs were attached, the ends equipped with pieces of lead or brass and with sharply pointed bits of bone or other sharp objects. The stripes were laid especially (not always exclusively) on the victim's back, bared and bent. So hideous and severe was this punishment that sometimes the victims would die before ever getting to the cross. The body was at times torn and lacerated to such an extent that deep-seated veins and arteries—sometimes even entrails and inner organs—were exposed. Those who were Roman citizens were not allowed to be scourged. Roman law laid no limits on the number of blows to be administered (the Jews were limited by their law to 40 blows, and to be safe

they stopped at 39--see 2 Cor. 11:24). The Lord's weakened condition following scourging may help to explain why He was unable to bear His cross all the way to Calvary.



The treatment of Christ by the Roman soldiers is given in verses 27-31 and may be summarized as follows:

They robed Him (v. 28) with a scarlet-purple robe. Throwing this around the scourged Saviour must have been uncomfortable indeed.

They crowned Him (v. 29) with a crown of thorns, pressing it upon His head.

They sceptered Him (v. 29) by placing a sturdy reed in His hand, for a King must have a scepter.

They adored Him (v. 29) in cruel mockery. A soldier would drop to his knees and say, "Hail, King of the Jews", then another would take his turn and still another until all had shared in this "fun."

They spit upon Him (v. 30), a truly vulgar and despicable form of ridicule.

They hit Him (v. 30). Before any of these mockers vacates his position in front of Jesus, he removes the stick from the hand of the victim and strikes Him on the head with it, as if to say, "What kind of a king you are! One that gets hit over the head with his own scepter!"

It is sobering to remember that these soldiers will have another day to stand before the King, even at the Great White Throne Judgment. There will be no mocking then. There will be no spitting then. Hell is at the end of a Christ-mocking, Christ-rejecting life.

Simon was forced to carry the cross (v. 32 "compelled"). The Lord Jesus also carried the cross as we learn in John 19:16,17, but not for long. Sheer physical

exhaustion made it impossible for Him to carry it very far.

### The Death of the King—The First Three Hours (Matthew 27:33-44)

Golgotha (verse 33) means “place of the skull” (the term “Calvary” means the same thing), possibly so named because the rock formations on this hill may have resembled a human skull. A skull speaks of death and certainly “Calvary” was the place of death. Three men—one innocent, two guilty—would die on this day.

Just before the crucifixion a drink was offered to Jesus (verse 34). This was vinegar (wine) mixed with gall (a bitter substance identified in Mark 15:23 as myrrh). Thus this was a “drugged” drink, and apparently the purpose of this drug was to deaden pain and alleviate suffering. When Jesus tasted it and realized what it was He refused to drink it. He did this no doubt because He wanted to endure with full consciousness all the pain that was in store for Him, in order to be our perfect Substitute and Saviour. [Our Lord’s response to this drug provides a wonderful lesson as to what the believer’s response should be to drugs which wrongly affect the mind and rob us of our full mental faculties. It also shows us how the Lord always faced His problems and never sought to escape from them, as many do today by their drug trips, drinking times, etc.] Note: We recognize that physician recommended pain killers used by modern medicine can be very helpful in managing a person’s pain. We are simply pointing out that our blessed Lord did not seek an escape from the pain and suffering which faced Him at Calvary’s cross.

The crucifixion itself is mentioned in the briefest of terms. It simply says, “They crucified Him” (verse 35). The gospel writers did not go into all the gory details because the essence of what took place on the cross involves not what the Romans did to Jesus (by driving nails through His hands and feet) but what God the Father did to Christ by judging Him for our sins. Many men have suffered and died by crucifixion, and many suffered on crosses much longer than Christ did. The awfulness of the cross cannot be appreciated unless one understands that “the LORD hath laid on Him the iniquity of of all” (Isaiah 53:6) and that “it pleased the LORD to bruise Him” (Isaiah 53:10). His suffering primarily involved our sins (1 Pet. 3:18), not the nails.

Verse 35 gives a remarkable example of fulfilled prophecy. This prediction was given in Psalm 22:18, penned by David a thousand years before the event took place (and centuries before death by Roman crucifixion was even known). The Roman soldiers fulfilled this prophecy to the smallest detail, and certainly these men were unfamiliar with the Hebrew Scriptures and were totally unaware that their actions were fulfilling God’s prophetic Word.

It was a custom to write the crime above the criminal so that all would know the reason he was dying. See verse 37 for what was written over the Lord’s head. He died because He was the rejected King of the Jews. He occupied the center cross surrounded on each side by criminals (verse 38). This was the fulfillment of Isaiah 53:12 (“numbered with the transgressors”).

Those who passed by were very vocal in their mocking (verses 39-43). If Christ had saved Himself and come down from the cross, as these mockers suggested, what would that have meant? If He had saved Himself (compare verse 42), then would He have been able to save others? It was God's love for the sinner that kept Him on the cross.

Verse 44 tells us about the robbers who died with Christ. Notice what both of these men were doing. This is in sharp contrast with Luke 23: 39-43 where we only find one robber mocking Christ. This is a fine example of the wonders of true repentance. One of the criminals stopped his mocking and repented. These two robbers are representative of all people. Every person resembles one of these robbers. Every person is a guilty sinner who either rejects Christ or receives Christ by faith. All men are drawn to that center cross (John 12: 32) and they each must decide what they will do with the Crucified One.

The Lord Jesus was on the cross for approximately six hours, from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

#### The Death of the King—The Last Three Hours (Matthew 27:45-50)

From noon to 3 p.m. there was darkness over all the land (verse 45). This was a supernaturally caused darkness (not a solar eclipse, which only lasts for five or so minutes and which never takes place during the time of Passover).

What took place during these three hours of darkness is indicated in verse 46 (darkness in Scripture is very often a symbol of judgment). These words were spoken toward the end of this three-hour period of darkness. They are first given in Aramaic (which was similar to Hebrew, the language spoken in Palestine) and then this expression is translated so that we know what it means. Why did God forsake and abandon and separate from His own Son? The answer to this question is suggested in Psalm 22: 3 (see also verse 1) and 2 Cor. 5:21. Martin Luther once said, "God forsaken by God, who can know it?" The Lord Jesus was forsaken by God so that we who believe in Him will never be forsaken by God (see Hebrews 13:5).

Verse 47 indicates a misunderstanding among some of those who stood there. When Jesus said, "Eli, Eli" they thought He was calling for "Elijah" (see also verse 49). The Lord was offered a drink and He accepted it, one reason being that He had something that He was about to say that was so important He did not want anyone to misunderstand His utterance. The drink would soothe His dry throat and enable Him to cry with a "loud voice" (verse 50). Matthew does not tell us what He cried, but John supplies the answer to this in his gospel (see John 19:30). It was the Lord's victory cry, after having finished the work of salvation (compare John 17:2-4). He fully paid for our sins. The debt was paid in full!

The expression “yielded up the ghost (spirit)” is further explained in Luke 23:46. This refers to the Lord’s physical death. His spiritual death (separation from God as the sinner’s Substitute) took place during the three hours of darkness when He was punished for our sins.

### Calvary Miracles (Matthew 27:51-54)

Verse 51 speaks of some of the amazing events (supernaturally caused) which accompanied the death of Christ.

What happened to the veil of the temple (verse 51) is very significant. The holy place in the temple was divided from the Holiest of All (the most holy place) by a great and beautiful veil. It was suspended by hooks from four pillars of gold. It measured sixty feet long by thirty feet wide, made up of seventy-two squares, and was reputed to be as thick as the palm of the hand. The priests claimed it took three hundred men to handle it because it was so heavy.

The purpose of the veil needed no explanation. It was not a gateway, but a barrier. It effectively excluded the ministering priests from entering the Holiest of All. Only once a year was it drawn aside to admit the High Priest on the Day of Atonement (see Leviticus 16 and compare Hebrews 9: 1-8). The High Priest would enter the most holy place to sprinkle the mercy seat with blood, making atonement for his own sins and those of the people.

For centuries the veil had hung gracefully in its place, but suddenly, at the very moment the Crucified One uttered His loud, expiring cry, the ministering priests heard a tearing sound. It was as if an unseen hand severed it by starting at the top. The veil fell apart before their awestricken gaze.

Who could express the solemnity of the moment when they found themselves gazing into the sanctuary where for centuries God had deigned to dwell, and into which none had dared enter under pain of death. Tradition has it that the priests, unwilling to accept the implications of this divine act, sewed up the curtain and resumed their ritual, as though no world-shaking event had taken place.

No human hand could have rent this veil. Because of the death of Christ, God was able to remove the barrier that stood between sinful men and a holy God. Why did Christ die for us? “Christ hath once suffered for sins, the Just (the Righteous One) for the unjust (the unrighteous ones), that He might bring us to God” (1 Peter 3: 18). Today God invites every believer to come before Him. The way has been opened by a mighty act of God (Hebrews 4: 16; 10: 19-20,22). How often do you take advantage of this free and open access to God (Eph. 2: 18)?

Matthew is the only gospel writer who tells us of certain saints who came out of the graves (verses 52-53). There was an earthquake which took place at the time of Christ’s death (verse 51). This earthquake caused the rocks to split and the

graves to be opened, but Matthew is careful to explain that the bodies of these saints did not arise until "after His resurrection" (verse 53), which indicates that Christ's resurrection took place first (compare 1 Cor. 15: 20). These risen saints went into Jerusalem and appeared to many people, letting them know that Christ's victory over death also guarantees that His believers will have victory over death.

Even in His dying and death the Lord Jesus demonstrated Who He was, as seen by the words of the centurion who was deeply moved by all that he saw and heard on that eventful day (verse 54).

### The Burial of the King (Matthew 27:55-66)

The Lord Jesus was buried in a rich man's tomb (verses 57-60), another fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy (Isaiah 53:9). The burial was proof of His death. The Lord Jesus really died on the cross. When He was taken off that cross He was really dead and He was really buried. Normally, dead bodies are buried, not live ones. Some unbelievers today, in order to try to disprove the resurrection, say that the Lord never really died on the cross. They insist that when He was placed in the tomb He was still living, and after some time He revived and was able to stand up and walk away telling everyone that He had risen from the dead. There is not one ounce of plausibility or truth to this theory.<sup>1</sup>

The burial of Christ is important. As Wilbur Smith once wrote: "We know more about the burial of the Lord Jesus than we know of the burial of any single character in all of ancient history. We know infinitely more about His burial than we do the burial of any Old Testament character, of any king of Babylon, of any Pharaoh of Egypt, of any philosopher of Greece, or of any triumphant Caesar. We know who took His body from the cross; we know something of the wrapping of the body in spices, and burial clothes; we know the very tomb in which this body was placed, the name of the man who owned it, Joseph, of a town known as Arimathaea. We know even where this tomb was located, in a garden nigh to the place where He was crucified, outside the city walls. We have four records of this burial of our Lord, all of them in amazing agreement, the record of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John."

This indicates that God considers the burial of Christ something very important. Why else would He take the time to record this event with such meticulous care and accuracy?

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<sup>1</sup>One man who proposed such a weak theory was Dr. Hugh J. Schonfield in his book *The Passover Plot*. I once read the following in a newspaper clipping: Q: Our preacher said, on Easter, that Jesus just swooned on the cross and that the disciples nursed Him back to health. What do you think? A: Beat your preacher with a cat-of-nine-tails with 39 heavy strokes; buffet him repeatedly; nail him to a cross, hang him in the sun for six hours; run a spear through his heart, embalm him; put him in an airless tomb for many hours and see what happens!

There is one prerequisite for being buried, as we have mentioned already. The person first must be dead! In fact, Pilate refused to let Jesus be buried until he first made sure that He was really dead (see Mark 15: 43-45)! The soldiers made sure that Christ was really dead (John 19: 33-34)! The fact that Christ was buried is proof that He died. Compare the great gospel facts in 1 Corinthians 15:3-5—"Christ died for our sins!" What's the proof? "He was buried!" "Christ rose again from the dead." What's the proof? "He was seen (by numerous eyewitnesses—1 Cor. 15:5 and following)!"

The burial of Christ not only proves that He died, but it also looks ahead to the empty tomb. The fact that Christ was buried gives unmistakable evidence that He really rose again. A dead body was placed in a tomb and was buried. Three days later that body was gone and the tomb was empty. All the world could come and look at the place where He was buried and see that the body was missing! "Come, see the place where the Lord lay" (Matthew 28: 6) is the great angelic invitation. The Lord's enemies did all that they could to keep Him buried forever (Matthew 27:62-66), but it was all in vain. "Up from the grave He arose!"

The women saw the exact place where the Lord was buried (verses 55-56,61). Some unbelievers say that the Lord did not really rise again from the dead but that the women mistakenly came to the wrong tomb, and this is how the resurrection rumor got started. However, this unsupportable theory does not take into account two key facts: 1) These women were eyewitnesses of His burial and they knew the exact location of the tomb; 2) Even if the women had made a mistake and gone to the wrong tomb, the enemies of the Lord would have quickly pointed out the correct tomb and in doing this would have forever silenced the rumors about His being alive. However, the Lord's enemies knew that the tomb was empty. All they needed to do was bring forth the Lord's body to demonstrate that He was dead, but they could not do this.

The last part of Matthew chapter 27 shows how the enemies made sure, as best they could, that the tomb of the Lord was secure and well-guarded. They had remembered that the Lord had predicted His own resurrection (verse 63; at least in this we give them more credit than the disciples who did not believe the Lord's predictions about His resurrection). These enemies seemed to fear that the disciples would come and steal the body and then tell everyone that He rose again from the dead. Some unbelievers still explain away the resurrection in this way (compare Matthew 28: 15).

Notice that they sealed the stone (verse 66). The seal of the stone was to make sure that no one would move the stone without it being very apparent and obvious. We are reminded of the seal which was placed on the stone guarding Daniel when he was in the den of lions (Daniel 6: 17). The seal at the entrance to our Lord's tomb could have been a cord covered with clay or wax on which an official Roman seal has been impressed. This was attached to the stone at the grave's entrance. The message was very clear: This seal is backed up by the power and authority of Rome—let no one tamper with this stone!

They also “set a watch” (verse 66) which means that they made sure that the tomb was well guarded by Roman soldiers given to them for this purpose by Pilate. Everything was set and ready for the greatest miracle of all time!

### The Resurrection of the King (Matthew 28:1-10)

In most biographies the last chapter written is about the person's death, because this is the last thing that happened to the man or woman. After a person dies that is it. There is not much more that can be said about a person after the person dies. The writing about the life ends where the life ends. After death the person will do no more and say no more. George Washington did not serve as our president after he died! Babe Ruth did not hit any more home runs after he died. Bach and Mozart and Beethoven did not write any more music after they died! Dead people just do not do such things. The man (or woman) has passed on and no other chapter can be written about the person's actual life.

The inspired biography of Jesus Christ is quite amazing. Notice that Matthew 27 (about the death of Christ) is not the last chapter! There is another chapter (chapter 28) which tells about a risen Christ! After the account of the death of Christ, the Lord's life story is not all over! We read more! We find this Man still doing certain things and saying certain things. The One who had been dead lives again. His biography continues on.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is mentioned at least 104 times in the New Testament. Without the resurrection there would be no gospel, no salvation, no Christianity and no message of hope for men.

Suppose a religious or political leader living today began to make the following announcement over the radio: “I want you all to know that when I go to London, my enemies will murder me and my body will be buried. However, in less than a week's time I will be raised from the dead and hundreds of people will see me alive.” What an extraordinary prediction coming from the lips of any man! Who would ever believe such a thing?

The Lord Jesus made just this kind of prediction repeatedly (Matthew 16:21; 17:9; 17:22-23; 20:18-19; 26:32), and as already mentioned, even His enemies were aware of this prediction (Matthew 27:63). This is why Matthew 28:6 says that He is risen as He said! The Lord Jesus was not a deceiver (compare Matthew 27:63) because what He had said was perfectly fulfilled.

Note that the stone was rolled away by the angel (Matthew 28:2) not by the Lord. The purpose of this was not to allow Jesus to get out of the tomb, but rather to show everyone that the tomb was already empty—“He is not here!” (verse 6). To some the risen Lord made personal appearances (verse 9) and these people became eye and ear witnesses (they both saw and heard the risen Lord; indeed they even touched Him--verse 9).

## The Soldiers Bribed (Matthew 28:11-15)

How did the enemies of the Lord handle the fact of His resurrection? See Matthew 28:11-15. It is very interesting to note that when a guard failed to do his job in Bible times, he was normally executed. Such was not the case with these guards. Instead of being executed they were paid! They were given "hush money" and were carefully instructed as to what to tell people. Sadly their lie has been believed by many people through the centuries; yet those with an open and sincere and seeking heart will discover the truth. He is risen indeed!

The Roman soldiers were paid money to tell people that while they were sleeping, the disciples stole the body. William MacDonald made these excellent observations:

The explanation of the soldiers raises more questions than it answers. Why were the soldiers sleeping when they should have been on guard? How could the disciples have rolled the stone away without waking them? How could all the soldiers have fallen asleep at the same time? If they were asleep, how did they know that the disciples stole the body? If the story was true, why did the soldiers have to be bribed to tell it? If the disciples had stolen the body, why had they taken time to remove the graveclothes and fold the napkin? (Luke 24:12; John 20:6,7). *Believer's Bible Commentary*, p. 1311

## The Great Commission of the King (Matthew 28:16-20)

The last part of Matthew 28 (verses 16-20) has been called the Great Commission. It is the Lord's "marching orders" for His Church. The Lord Jesus was soon to return to heaven and He would be the "Head" of the Church (Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:18). Yet in a special and unique way He would still be present with His believers on earth (Matt. 28:20).

In verse 19 the text says, "teach all nations." This is the key command of the Great Commission. Literally it means, "Make disciples of all nations." A disciple is a student, a learner. The disciples of Christ must be fully instructed (verse 20).

During the forty-day period immediately following the resurrection, the Lord Jesus gave His marching orders to His faithful disciples. Luke records that before Christ was taken up to heaven "He gave commandments unto the apostles whom He had chosen" (Acts 1:2). These solemn commandments comprise what is generally known as "The Great Commission."

In the Great Commission, the Lord Jesus Christ gave His farewell address, His parting words, His final instructions to the men who would soon become the first members of His Church. What really is the mission of the Church today? What is

our God-given task and responsibility? Why does the Church of Jesus Christ exist? What exactly has our sovereign Lord and Head told us to do? These crucial questions can only be answered by a careful study of the Great Commission passages. Along with Matthew 28: 16-20 the following passages should be studied: 1) The Great Commission According to Mark (Mark 16:14-20); 2) The Great Commission According to Luke (Luke 24:44-53; Acts 1:1-8); 3) The Great Commission According to John (John 20:19-23 and John 17:18).<sup>2</sup>

The outworking of this commission has been taking place during the last 2000 years. Christ has been successfully building his Church (Matthew 16: 18). The King of the Jews will someday again return to this earth, but during this present age He is doing something very special: "and the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved" (Acts 2:47). Are you involved with what God is doing today? How?

### Notes for Further Study

Matthew 27:26. Barabbas (this name means "son of the father") should have died on the center cross. Consider the following: 1) Barabbas knew that he was guilty and that he had committed crimes worthy of death. He knew that he deserved to go to that cross and to suffer the death penalty. He knew he was justly condemned. 2) Jesus Christ was perfectly innocent and guiltless. Pilate knew this (Matthew 27:23-24); Pilate's wife knew this (Matthew 27:19); the thief on the cross knew this (Luke 23:41); even Judas knew this (Matthew 27:3-4). Barabbas probably knew this as well. He probably wondered, "Why is this good man dying on that cross instead of me?" Christ once suffered for sins, the Just One for the unjust ones that He might bring us to God (1 Peter 3:18). 3) Barabbas knew that Jesus was his Substitute. "Jesus, Son of the Father" took his place. Jesus went to the cross instead of Barabbas. During the past 2000 years many unbelievers have denied the doctrine of the substitutionary death of Christ and have said, "I do not believe that Christ died for me!" But this was a truth that Barabbas could never deny! No one can ever question the fact that Christ died for Barabbas! 4) Barabbas knew that he had done nothing whatever to merit or to deserve this substitutionary death. He deserved death, but he was given freedom. Christ was condemned so that he could be released! 5) Barabbas knew that his Substitute died so that he would not have to die. The only question before Pilate was whether Christ should die or Barabbas. When it was decided that Christ should die, Barabbas was set free (Matthew 27:26). The demands of the law had been met and Roman justice had been satisfied. He never needed to fear death by crucifixion (unless he should commit additional crimes at some later time). Christ died so that Barabbas could live.

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<sup>2</sup>See our study on *The Great Commission According to John*.

Matthew 27:29-31. For more information on the terrible abuse the Lord suffered at the hands of sinful men, see our *Life of Christ* studies, chapter 13.

Matthew 27:45. Jewish time began at sunrise, so the sixth hour would be noon and the ninth hour would be 3:00 p.m.

Matthew 27:60. This "great stone" was of enormous weight. It was probably shaped like a millstone and stood on its edge in a channel which was also carved out of stone. It probably was rolled downhill to close the tomb, but it would be quite a job to roll it uphill to open the tomb. In other words, it was much easier to roll it into place than to roll it out of place.

Matthew 28:6. We must never minimize the significance of the empty tomb. Abraham's tomb is occupied. Moses' tomb is occupied. Confucius' tomb is occupied. Buddha's tomb is occupied. Mohammed's tomb is occupied. But Christ's tomb is empty!

Matthew 28:7,10. The meeting with the risen Lord in Galilee was significant. Apparently it was there that over 500 people saw Him (1 Cor. 15:6) and it was there that the Great Commission was given (Matthew 28:16-20).