

Matthew 27:45-56 – “The Death of Death” – June 29, 2025

1. One recurring theme in Matthew is Christ’s journey from dust to glory
 - a. Humiliation to exaltation
2. Last week in vv. 27-44 we saw the intensity of Christ’s humiliation and the mocking and the scoffing of the Romans
 - a. Despite all this mocking, Paul’s words that *God is not mocked* still stand, since the mocking itself was turned inside out
 - b. This is frequently the way God tells stories, the story gets turned inside-out; in this case the mockers turn out to be the brunt of their own mocking
 - i. God tells the story in such a way that these men have served their purpose; their mocking paves the way for Christ to be exalted
 - c. That theme carries into this portion of Ch. 27
 - i. In the death of Christ, what we really have is the death of death itself
 1. It is Christ, and not death, that will have the final word in this contest
3. CHILDREN
 - a. *Even though the Jews and the Romans did not like each other, they worked together to kill Jesus. Their hatred of Jesus was the strongest feeling they had, so they worked together to humiliate Him, torture Him, and even kill Him. Today, Jesus dies on the cross. His body and His spirit are separated from each other. What makes Jesus’ death different than a normal person’s death, is that Jesus spent His entire life being a new Adam and a new Israel. God put all the sins of all His people on Jesus’ shoulders, and that is why His death is so important. All*

of us will die one day. If we have not put our faith in Jesus, our sin stays on our shoulders and we will have to answer for it. But if we have put our faith in Jesus, then God put all of your sins on His shoulders and He took the punishment for you. Jesus took this punishment so that we can be forgiven.

4. VV.45-47 – *“Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. 46 And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” that is, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” 47 And some of the bystanders, hearing it, said, “This man is calling Elijah.”*

- a. The day started at 6am, so the 6th to 9th hours would be from 12pm-3pm
 - i. These would be the brightest hours of the day
- b. This is not darkness in the sense of an overcast day or of a solar eclipse
 - i. No solar eclipse lasts for 3 hours; it was full moon
 - ii. There are accounts as far away as Rome and Egypt that this darkness was experienced there as well
 - 1. Phlegon, Sextus Julius Africanus, and Thallus all speak of the sun going dark, followed by earthquakes
 - 2. Dionysius the Areopagite – *“Either the divine being suffers, or suffers with him that suffers, or the frame of the world is dissolving.”*
 - a. He was not a Christian at the time, but became one
 - b. High profile enough that he is mentioned in Acts 17:34
- c. A supernatural light announced the birth of Jesus, and now a supernatural darkness is announcing His death

- d. The time of the darkness comes to a close at the 9th hour, or 3pm, the time at which the evening sacrificial lambs would be roasting for Passover
 - i. As these typological lambs are roasting, the final sacrificial lamb to whom they point is Himself being sacrificed and roasting under the intensity of God's wrath against human sinfulness
 - 1. All the accumulated guilt of every believer is on Christ's shoulders, and God is directing all His justice directly at it
 - 2. Just as Adam represented all his children, making them all guilty, now Christ is representing all God's children, making them all righteous
 - 3. Because of God's grace, even unbelievers enjoy common grace
 - a. *The sun shines on the just and on the unjust*
 - b. But the concentration of human sin on the person of Jesus means that for three hours, the sun is now withheld even from the Saviour Himself
 - c. Jesus is the light of the world, and if He is bearing the guilt of His people, it is fitting that the light goes out
- e. Darkness in the prophetic language is a picture of God's judgment
 - i. Joel 2; Amos 5; Zeph. 1
 - ii. Usually this is metaphorical language; physical darkness is not seen at Pentecost, for example
 - iii. But occasionally, the veil between heaven and earth; between the seen and the unseen world, gets very thin

1. God's actions become visible to human eyes
 - iv. Here the darkness of God's judgment shows up, and even pagans from Rome to Egypt are forced to see it
- f. There is one other time where God's judgment from heaven results in darkness on the earth
 - i. Interestingly, it was also at the Passover; the first one
 - ii. The 9th plague plunged Egypt into a darkness; not just a darkness that is the absence of light, but a darkness which *could be felt* (Ex. 10:21-22)
 - iii. What followed on the heels of that heavy darkness was the final plague; the death of the firstborn
 - iv. The nation of Israel has become idolatrous, and hard of heart just like Egypt was
 - v. If Israel has become another Egypt, then her firstborn must also die
 1. This can be none other than Jesus Christ
- g. Jesus cries out in Aramaic "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*"
 - i. This is found in Psalm 22:1
 - ii. The similarity of *Eli* to *Elijah* (Yahweh is God) means that the bystanders either misunderstood what Jesus was saying, or worse, were mocking Him yet more
- h. But the forsakenness of Christ is what should weigh heavily on us here
 - i. When Moses was leading the Israelites, God was helping him
 - ii. When Joseph was in the dungeon, God was with him

- iii. When David lay weeping into his pillow and used his sleepless nights to pen the Psalms, God was with him
- iv. When Daniel was in the lion's den, God was with him
 - 1. When him and his two friends were in the furnace, God visibly joined him as the fourth man
- v. But now that Jesus Christ is becoming a curse for us, He is so repugnant that the Father won't even look at Him
 - 1. This is not a rupture or a divorce in the Trinity; that is impossible
 - 2. But the man Jesus Christ was truly forsaken in this darkness and this heaviness that could most certainly be felt
- i. 2 Cor. 5:21 says that God made Christ *to become sin for us*; Gal. 3:13 says that Christ *became a curse for us*
 - i. But even in the intensity of Christ's suffering, even as God must look away from all that sin, we should never miss Jesus' confession
 - ii. "My God, my God..."
 - 1. Jesus is undeterred to carry out the mission of the Father
 - 2. Even in His darkest moment, the Son knows that He belongs to the Father, and the Father belongs to Him!
 - 3. Scoffers and mockers in our day reject PSA because it looks like "child abuse"
 - a. But remember that the Son is God and the Father is God
 - b. There is one divine essence and divine one will that all three persons of the Trinity share in

- c. This is not one person venting to another, but this is God the Son willingly carrying out the mission of God the Father
 - i. The same divine will is in each person
 - ii. A covenanted agreement between Father, Son, and Spirit to accomplish redemption this way, so God is not impulsively venting against some 3rd party
- 4. No Christian will ever face the rejection that Christ suffered
 - a. When we are called to take up our crosses for Christ, we are not replicating what He did, we can only imitate
 - b. When we are in our own season of testing, crying out to God and wondering why He seems so far away, we can take deep comfort in the fact that God's own Son not only felt this way, but actually experienced it more deeply than we do
 - c. Do we also imitate Christ in His ability to say *MY God* when we are in those painful seasons?
- j. In this three hours of darkness, I believe that God has made the veil between heaven and earth so thin that we can at least partially see through it
 - i. For three hours, God is transferring the guilt of the world onto Jesus
 - ii. Imagine being able to see all this guilt moving like a visible wind, coming from the corners of the world onto a man suspended in the darkness between heaven and earth

- k. This is not the sin of those who refuse Christ; they must answer to God on their own; but it is also not just the *idea* of sin
 - l. This is personal guilt. This is for *you*.
- 5. VV.48-50 – *“And one of them at once ran and took a sponge, filled it with sour wine, and put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink. 49 But the others said, “Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him.” 50 And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit.”*
 - a. The offer of sour wine is further fulfillment of Psalm 69:21, as was v.34
 - b. Matthew Poole also comments on v.49 that the expectation of Elijah is most likely a misunderstanding of the dialect, but that their using it as mockery is completely consistent with their previous behaviour
 - i. These men have been mockers the whole time, and they refuse to take anything seriously; they abuse and shout and gamble even in front of the Saviour as though this is all one big joke
 - c. V.50 Jesus dies
 - i. It appears that He has been passive this entire time, and in one sense that is of course true
 - ii. But while Jesus is the Son of God, it is just as true that He is God the Son
 - 1. He is in charge of everything; even the mockers are serving His divine purposes
 - 2. Nothing is happening out of His control here, even down to His own physical death

- iii. The separation of body and spirit is not something that *happens to* Christ; it is something that He *gives up*
 - d. The creation itself is involved in the death of Christ
 - i. The light has reverted to darkness
 - ii. This is de-creation language – the sun, moon, and stars are falling out of the sky
 - iii. When Christ dies, the old world died with Him
 - iv. Leithart – “*As Jesus dies, creation is moving in reverse. A world is coming to an end. The sun is blotted out, and the moon does not give her light, the stars fall from the sky. The clock stops for the Jews and the Romans who have put Jesus on that cross. Out of that darkness comes a voice, a loud voice, a voice like thunder, like the sound of many waters. The cry at Golgotha articulates, gives audible shape, to the darkness that surrounds it.*”
 - v. There’s been a long series of catastrophic events leading to Jesus’ death, and now it’s over.
 - 1. I have sat next to several people as they lay dying. It is a sobering experience.
 - 2. No breathing. No movement. No brainwaves. No heartbeat.
 - vi. Jesus died. Israel died. Judah died. The old covenant world died. *The curse died.*
- 6. VV.51-53 – “*And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split. 52 The tombs also were opened. And many*

bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, 53 and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many.”

- a. Part of the curse in the garden was that heaven and earth became divorced
- b. God and man were separated
- c. That separation was guarded by angels with flaming swords, and the worship of Israel had many reminders of the separation of heaven and earth
- d. The veil of the temple guarded the Most Holy Place
 - i. Only the High Priest could enter, and only once a year
 - ii. The veil wasn't a light curtain either
 - 1. 60' x 30', thick threading, and layers that made it 4" thick
 - 2. Weighed hundreds of lbs
 - iii. When Christ dies, the barrier between God and man comes down
 - 1. The tear moves from top to bottom; this is God's doing and not man's
- e. Christ's road to humiliation has reached its low point and now He is climbing upward in His exaltation!
- f. The Father has received the Son's payment for sin
 - i. The apostles have scattered; those present are scoffers
 - ii. The most pivotal moment of cosmic history has gone virtually unnoticed
 - iii. There is no choir singing; there is no prophet or priest preaching
 - iv. There are no worshippers
- g. What has Jesus previously said would happen if there was no human praise?
 - i. *The rocks would cry out!*

- h. What we have here is a picture of new life
 - i. This is a Genesis 1 picture; a re-creation of the world after Christ
 - ii. The darkness turns into light, and the earth produces living men
- i. Atonement has been made and a new chapter in world history begins
 - i. When the temple veil tears, this means that God, in Christ, has removed the barrier
 - ii. Hebrews 10:19-25 – *“Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, 20 by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. 23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. 24 And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, 25 not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”*
 - 1. the author of Hebrews says that the opened curtain gives us direct access to God
 - 2. we no longer go through priests, but we can come directly to God
 - 3. the tearing of the curtain marks the end of the ceremonial law, the priesthood, and the old covenant system
 - 4. what used to separate Jews and Gentiles is gone

- a. there is now one multi-ethnic church of Christ across the globe
 - b. the gospel is the only thing that can actually answer racial envy and tension
 - i. wokeness and other man-made ideas only inflame the problem of sin
 - ii. the gospel answers it
- j. when the earth shakes and the rocks split apart, the world itself is recognizing that the curse is being reversed
 - i. the creation has been groaning, and now signs of new life are appearing
 - ii. *the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light* (Isa. 9:2)
 - iii. resurrection is happening
 - 1. Ezekiel compares the fallen human heart to a stone
 - a. This stone too must be broken so it can praise God
- k. The mini-resurrection of the saints in the tombs of Jerusalem points in the same direction
 - i. There's a commotion in the heart of the earth, and after Jesus is resurrected, these OT saints came out of their tombs
 - ii. The question sometimes comes up about what happened to these resurrected saints
 - 1. Calvin wisely states that we shouldn't trouble ourselves too much over it, since no clear answer is given

- a. There is no problem if they go back to their grave after having completed the task God gave them of appearing
- b. But since their coming out of the grave follows Christ's resurrection, it is more likely that this mini-resurrection is a final one
- c. *“But it is more probable that the life which they received was not afterwards taken from them; for if it had been a mortal life, it would not have been a proof of a perfect resurrection. Now, though the whole world will rise again, and though Christ will raise up the wicked to judgment, as well as believers to salvation, yet as it was especially for the benefit of his Church that he rose again, so it was proper that he should bestow on none but saints the distinguished honor of rising along with him.”*
- d. In this action, these saints are an early picture of what lies ahead – bodily resurrection
 - i. Heaven is not the final chapter for Christians
 - ii. Resurrection is – body and soul knit back together to live on this planet in its completely renewed and restored condition

7. VV.54-56 – *“When the centurion and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe and said, “Truly this was the Son of God!”* 55 *There were also many women there, looking on from*

a distance, who had followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to him, 56 among whom were Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Joseph and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.”

- a. Given the way that the creation itself has responded to Christ’s death, now even the scoffers are moved to make an orthodox confession that Christ was who He said He was
- b. The whole series of controversies and trials of Thursday night, from Caiaphas to Pilate, has been over this question of who Jesus was
- c. The whole conflict of Holy Week and Jesus’ final confrontation with the Pharisees and the priests was over this same question
- d. Now the very Romans who put Jesus to death understand who he is
 - i. The Jews have rejected their Messiah, and now the hated Romans open themselves up to Him
- e. This should serve as a reminder for us today that God sometimes converts the most unlikely people
 - i. This is because salvation is not something we do, but is a gift from the Lord
 - ii. He is the ones who opens our eyes so we can see what is truly there
 - iii. What if a future member of Trinity is injecting his arm with heroin right now while we’re worshipping? What if a future mother in this congregation had an abortion last month?
- f. The women of v.55 & 56 hold a special place in the history of redemption

- i. Peter denied Jesus, Judas betrayed Jesus and then killed himself; Pilate is tormented in his soul for knowing the truth about Jesus and still letting himself be steered by the crowd
- ii. The apostles scatter, but these godly women who had ministered to Jesus are present
- iii. Calvin gives high praise to these women for being stronger and more steadfast than the men had been
- iv. In the providence of God, it is these faithful and godly women who bear testimony to the resurrection

8. A passage like this cuts to the heart of the gospel

- a. Who is Jesus of Nazareth?
- b. What happened at the cross?
- c. What are you going to do with your guilt?
 - i. Are you fool enough to think you can take it with you in front of the Father?
 - ii. Jesus Christ bore the shame and humiliation and curse so that we don't have to
 - iii. John Owen – The Death of Death in the Death of Christ
 - 1. Christ is the victor over the last enemy, which is death
 - 2. We may wonder how death persists if Jesus has conquered it already
 - a. Same question of how the old world died and the new one was created at Calvary

- b. Wedding analogy – vows, rings, pronouncement, legal paperwork, consummation
 - c. *God works organically in stages, multiple series of events working together towards a specific outcome*
 - d. The fact of death continues until Christ returns to wrap up history
- 3. The *sting* of death has been removed by Christ, however
 - a. For the Christian, physical death is not a punishment for sin, but is one step closer to glory
 - b. It is a transition to the better
- 4. This is the blessed hope for those who belong to Christ
 - a. This is why when Christ asks us to follow Him, and He gives us our own crosses to bear, our resolve to press into glory must also be oriented as His was
 - b. He too is moving His saints from dust to glory, from humiliation to glorification
 - c. As we live in this in-between time, in the *already, but not yet*, we experience many moments of tasting the glory and of experiencing the humiliation
 - i. Children not following the Lord
 - ii. Strained marriage
 - iii. Financial difficulties
 - iv. Health problems & death

- d. The *not yet* aspect of the death of death means that much difficulty and suffering remain
 - i. Even in these reminders of the fall, nothing we face will match the curse that Christ faced
 - ii. Our sufferings are real, but they happen in the shadow of the cross
 - 1. The shadows themselves are a reminder that we will never be utterly forsaken by the Father as the man Jesus was; He became a curse *for us* – the curse is gone even if its echoes can still be heard
- e. The *already* aspect of the death of death means that we have a much clearer picture of resurrection and of glory than even the greatest OT saints had
 - i. We also live in the light of the cross
 - 1. The light that started as a dim flicker at Golgotha is growing ever brighter as the kingdom pushes outward and the day of Christ's return draws nearer
 - 2. The light flickers enough in Jerusalem to show us what resurrection is like

- a. We too will have our souls and our bodies joined back together just as these saints did
- b. But when it happens at the great resurrection, we will walk out of our graves into a much better Jerusalem than they saw; all the remnants and shadows of sin will have been sent away
- c. Every Lord's Day is a reminder of resurrection; the first day of the new creation
 - i. Gathering is so essential, if we understand, we know it is not legalism, but pressing into new life that causes us to not neglect this gathering (Heb. 11:25)

9. COMMUNION

- a. Fence the table
- b. *We've just heard a sermon about the gospel. The Lord's Supper is a sermon that involves sight, smell, taste, and touch. This is a means of grace in which God is feeding and strengthening us; reminding us of the body which was crushed and*

the blood which was shed so that our sins could be forgiven. When we take these elements in through our mouth, we are internalizing Christ. We are being filled with Him. We are in union with Him; we were crucified with Him and we will be raised with Him. So come, and welcome to Jesus Christ.

10. CHARGE

- a. *When God first created the world, He spoke light to come forth out of the darkness. When He re-creates the world, He does it through the cross of His Son. The world is remade when God the Son enters into the darkness, suffers in the darkness, passes through the chaos of de-creation, and triumphs over it again. Being in union with Christ means that Jesus calls us to share in His cross. This means that we share in the darkness. When God gives us a cross to bear, our instinct is to try to get down. We want to remake our own personal world by leaving the cross, but this is impossible. So, Christian, your charge is to remember that the world is remade by those who have the Spirit, who bear their crosses after Jesus, who stay focused on the mission, who are willing to enter the darkness, and cry out to the Father from there. We are not wiser than God. Resurrection comes through death, and light comes through darkness.*

11. BENEDICTION

- a. *Romans 8:38, 39 – “For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*