

24 Hours - The Cross

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Bible Text: John 19:16-25

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Today we come to a study in our series that, to be quite honest with you, is not necessarily strictly chronological. What I mean by that is today we are going to deal with the actual dealings of the cross. What is it that Jesus actually endured as he went to and he hung upon that cross? As He was there, for some five to six hours in length He did utter seven specific statements that we will deal with later. He did talk to the thieves who were on either side of Him. And so we are not necessarily going to be chronological today, because we would have to deal with the cross every single week from this time forward. But I want to just take a step back and look at what was the actual process, what was the actual event known as the cross.

Now let me give you a warning before we come to Matthew 27. Not only is this a little bit out of the chronology, but I am going to be just honest with you from the beginning. I am going to be as “tactful” as possible, but today is also going to be the most gruesome of all the messages. We are just going to deal with what the Bible says occurred to Jesus Christ when He was on the cross.

In Matthew 24:33 coming on the heels of last week’s man by the name of Simon of Cyrene carrying the cross from Pilate’s headquarters all the way to a mount called Calvary or Golgotha. Verse 33.

And when they were come unto a place called Golgotha, that is to say, a place of a skull, They gave Him vinegar to drink mingled with gall: and when he had tasted thereof, he would not drink. And they crucified Him, and parted his garments, casting lots: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, they parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture did they cast lots. And sitting down they watched Him there; and set up over his head his accusation written, THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS.¹

Now just a couple of concepts that I want to pull from this passage and those of you that were here and free this Easter as I said I believe one of the greatest misunderstandings or the greatest understatements in all of the world is that verse where it says:

“And they crucified Him.”²

What a simple statement with such incredible ramifications. There are a couple of things I want to address today and the first one is this, the criticalness of the cross. The cross is

¹ Matthew 27:33-37.

² Matthew 27:35.

absolutely critical to understanding everything of which Jesus was and is and what the Christian faith is. Now when I say the cross is critical, I don't mean a critical analysis of it, but realizing that this is the centerpiece of the Christian faith and two elements are involved here. The first one is this: the prophecy behind the cross. The cross of Jesus was prophesied. It was not something Jesus did because it was convenient. It is not a "trap" that Jesus fell into because he just happened to be at the time in which the Romans reigned supreme and this was their favorite way to eliminate a criminal. What we know as the cross of Jesus Christ was not accidental, but it was prophesied.

Now I want you to turn back to Psalms 22 in the Old Testament. Even though it is the Holy Spirit who inspired those who gave us what we know as Scripture, a man by the name of King David, who lived approximately one thousand years before the time of Jesus Christ, in Psalms 22 gives us probably the greatest vast description of what we know as the cross event. By the way, as you are turning there, in the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus there are 48 specific prophecies regarding things that would occur in that time span. Eight of those prophecies, one-sixth of all prophecies related to the person of Jesus Christ, take place in Psalms 22. They are regarding the cross of Jesus Christ. And if you pick up in Psalms 22 and you look in verse 16 it says:

"For dogs have compassed me: the assembly of the wicked has inclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet."³

Now, number one, it is phenomenal that it was actually prophesied years in advance. Let me share with you the historical significance of Psalms 22. What we know as crucifixion, what we know as the ancient death penalty, taking an individual and piercing their hands and their feet on a piece of wood, and hanging them for all the world to jeer at, that practice of torture and death, did not even take place until the sixth century BC.

So King David when, even though inspired by the Holy Spirit, did not say, "Oh, I have seen these people do that. That is what is going to happen to the Messiah."

You understand he had no concept whatsoever of a crucifixion. He had never seen one, never heard of one. The Romans weren't even in existence, into their power at this point. So the Holy Spirit says literally 500 years before anybody would crucify anybody that the Messiah, God in flesh, would be crucified, would be put to death by a process that didn't even exist at the time. What we know as crucifixion became commonplace in the third century when the Romans came to power and used it, unfortunately, as their favorite means of execution.

And so when we look at how critical the cross of Jesus Christ is, understand, it is not critical because He just happened to be on one. It is critical because long before it even was used God said, "This is how I will pay for the sins of humanity."

It was prophesied. But the second thing is it parallels. It is important to know the criticalness because of the parallel of the cross. And this is where we transfer into our

³ Psalms 22:16.

modern culture. You and I live in a world today that when we want to display that we are a Christian, when we want to speak that the faith of Jesus Christ is important to us, we do not wear t-shirts with Jesus walking on water. We don't have jewelry made with Him healing the blind man, do we? No. Every time we want to represent Jesus Christ in the Christian faith, we do it with a cross.

In fact, I had an individual come up to me today and share with me some valuable information, that there is on our property a large cross. When this building was erected some years ago they brought it from old town and now the trees and the bushes have grown up and it is not as visible as it used to be. And the question was brought to my attention. I had not even thought of it. Is there any way to make it more visible?

Now let me share with you the significance of that, because we live in a world today where they are debating in southern California can you or can you not put a cross on public property. They are debating when it comes to the cemeteries, is this something because it is a religious expression? I could have a whole other sermon for another day that nobody has any trouble with Hindu temples and Muslim's wearing things, but they have a real problem with the cross of Jesus Christ. But nonetheless, can you imagine? Just work with me for a moment. Let me show you the parallel here.

Can you imagine if we gathered today over 1000 of us that will be on this campus today, if we gathered up and we developed a plan, we developed as strategy that there was a belief, there was a philosophy, there was within us such a conviction of something that we wanted to tell the whole world about it. And if we decided that from this point until the day we breathe our last breath that whether it was on the clothing we wore or that which we put on a hillside, we were going to promote, advocate, speak, preach and live the electric chair.

Now think about that for a moment. Can you imagine jewelry made with an electric chair on it? Imagine, we put our money together and we create a 40 foot tall electric chair, put it on the hillside for the entire world to see.

You say, "That is absurd."

No, that is the cross. Until we grasp that the cross of Jesus Christ was the way of the death penalty, when we talk about the criticalness of it, when we see the cross just as jewelry, when we see the cross just as a t-shirt, when we see that it is the emblem we have for our organization or our group, yes, it is the centerpiece of Christianity. But do you understand that it also was the first-century version of the death penalty? That is how critical it is to understand what the cross is. It was prophesied and it parallels in our culture one of the most gruesome events in a human's life possible. That is how critical the cross is, which leads us to the second point more in Matthew 27.

I want to talk about the cruelty of the cross. The cross was and is cruel. You have often heard people say that Jesus went to a cruel cross called Calvary. What we are about to share, as I addressed earlier, is not benevolent, it is not sweet. It is not passive. We are

going to deal with just the simple facts of what actually took place when Jesus Christ was placed on a cross.

In Matthew 27 it addresses what we read when it says:

“And they crucified Him,”⁴ in verse 35.

But I want you to go back up to verse 26. Verse 26 chronologically actually took place before Simon of Cyrene, whom we studied last week, when Pilate comes to that point where he gives into the mob and he gives in to the populist opinion, he trades Barabbas, a known murderer, thief and killer for Jesus. He takes Jesus back and Jesus is, “scourged.” After he is scourged the mocking begins. That is what we read last week where they put a crown of thorns upon His head. They put purple raiment on Him. They bowed down mocking Him calling Him King of the Jews.

But before all the mocking took place, verse 26 of Matthew 27 just simply says:

“Then released he Barabbas unto them: and when he had scourged Jesus, he delivered Him to be crucified.”⁵

The scourging, if you will. What is it that Jesus... I mean, having railroad spikes placed through your wrists and through your feet being, put on a wooden cross literally to be hung. By the way, most people when they died on a cross, they did it from losing breath. They literally suffocated to death when they had to raise up time and time again. I mean, it was a painful, painful event. But even before Jesus had the nails in His wrist and in His feet, it says they scourged Him.

Now we are familiar with this because we have seen movies and we have read stories and we have had all kinds of pictorials of it. And one of the ideologies that is out there is that Jesus was “whipped or scourged” 39 times. It is an Old Testament law that when one that was to be “whipped or scourged,” that they were to do 40 times minus one because whoever was inflicting the pain, if they broke the law, could be scourged themselves.

In the book of Acts we find that the apostle Paul was scourged many times by the Jewish leaders whom he used to preach for, but now was preaching against. The difference is that here in this passage Jesus is not being scourged by Jews. He is being scourged by trained killers. He is not being scourged by a bunch of religious political leaders who have got a beef with Him. He is being scourged by men who get paid to inflict pain and to kill people.

When the Jews, when they would scourge someone, the famous 39 lashes—do not get me wrong—it was a horrific event. But what they would do is they would take a bull whip, for lack of better terms, of a strand of leather, but what they would do; the Jews were different than the Romans, because the Jews would use basically wild rose bushes. That

⁴ Matthew 27:35.

⁵ Matthew 27:26.

is the best way I can describe it. They would tie them together and they would use that as a whip, so to speak.

Now the apostle Paul testified in the book of Acts there were several times he was, scourged 39 times and left for dead. It would do incredibly horrific pain. I cannot imagine, because I have wild rose bushes in my backyard and I have been scraped by them. I have been impaled by them. I could not imagine with no clothes on being scourged by them, a horrific event. Do not get me wrong.

But it pales to nothing to what the Romans would have done. The Romans used a formally known item called the flagellum, but we know it is as the cat o' nine tails. It was like a bull whip that contained nine bull whips. It was about six feet in length and contained nine strings or straps of leather and in that leather they would weave pieces of clay, pottery and anything else that they could find that was sharp to inflict pain.

Now I want you to think about this for a moment, because when we look at the cruelty of the cross, I want to talk about what happens in the outside of Jesus' body and then I want to talk about what happened on the inside. What happened on the outside? They would take this cat o' nine tails and they would scourge or strike Jesus. Now what is interesting about the Roman form of, "execution and scouring" is that the average person only made it to about eight to nine lashes. Can you imagine? I mean, you think about nine lashes times nine is actually 81 straps of leather with pottery and other pieces that are designed for one purpose, to imbed into the body and to tear out whatever is in the way. That is the purpose. That is what they did.

You know, the book of Isaiah 52:14 there is a passage of Scripture that describes the crucifixion of Jesus. And it says that he was more marred than any other man. His visage or his appearance was horrific. In that prophetic element written 700 years before Jesus would ever go to the cross, it said that when they looked up on Calvary, when they looked at Jesus who had been scourged; his appearance was so dramatic He did not even look like a human being. His flesh had been so torn. The blood was running so thick. Can you imagine that cat o' nine tails with shards of who knows what being whipped? Now it would take place. It would hit obviously the back, the torso, the legs, the arms and who knows what else part of the body time after time after time again. It was a malicious, violent process.

After this He is mocked and then He goes to what we know as the cross event. And so on the outside a horrific event. But we rarely talk about what happened on the inside. I want you to go back to Psalms 22 and I want you to notice something that is spoken in this prophecy about the cross. In verse 14 it says:

"I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint."⁶

Now the Bible makes it very specific that none of the bones of Jesus were never broken. In fact, as we will study in a few weeks with the two thieves on each side of Jesus, the

⁶ Psalm 22:14.

Sabbath was closing in; they needed to get the bodies down. They go to break the legs of thieves so that they will die of suffocation. They go to Jesus. He is already deceased. He is already dead. The Roman soldiers put the sword in the side. Out comes water and blood. Not a bone was broken. It says, "All his bones were out of joint."

The best way that I could describe what happened on the inside of Jesus is to parallel it to having something dislocated. I don't know if you have ever had an item dislocated in your body, maybe a shoulder, maybe a finger or such, but I have unfortunately had this. For those of you who may be a first time guest or visitor, I know I say this all the time and it just kind of describes why I am such a messed up guy. I am from Texas and everybody from Texas plays football. That is part of what you have to do. But look at me. Not everybody who plays football is good at football. You understand that, right? It is a right of passage for all young men. When I did play football I was what they called a fullback. A fullback is nothing but the guy who takes all the punishment so the guy who gets the ball can score all the points. That is all it is. You can't name very many famous fullbacks in the NFL throughout the years because nobody knows who they are because there is this unknown character.

Usually what happened is any time we ran a play, they faked the ball to me and they said go hit the guy twice your size. And then the guy who was really fast went and scored a touchdown and he got all the hugs from all the cheerleaders and I am sitting there in agony and pain on the middle of the field. That is how it works.

But every now and then maybe we had a second and three or a third and three. All they needed was a couple of yards, particularly towards the end of the game, since I had been faked the ball so many times they would give me the ball, maybe once, maybe twice a game, because nobody expected me to actually have the ball.

And so that happened in this game. I got the ball. I made my three or four yards. In the process of getting tackled, because I rarely ran with the ball, I did something incredibly ignorant. I did not just go down like a normal person would, I tried to get that extra yard and when I did I put my shoulder forward. When I landed on the ground with this really big guy behind me it dislocated my shoulder forward. So I am sitting there with my shoulder about two inches in front of my body, not wanting to come out of the game, because you don't want to admit that you are a wimp, right? So I am in the huddle with my hand dragging, thinking, well, the good news is I know they are not going to give me the ball again because they only do it one time a game, so it is like I have to worry about carrying the ball. Here was the problem. The next play was a running play up the middle where I had to block the linebacker who was twice my size. No problem, right? Until you run through the line and see a guy twice your size and twice your weight who comes up and hits you in the shoulders, who then takes my shoulder and throws it out backwards.

Mel Gibson, *Lethal Weapon*. Does that ring a bell? There I am. My shoulder is hanging backwards. At this point I chivalrously took myself out of the game. I said, "This is enough." And they did what trainers do and they popped it in. For the next week my

shoulder just hung. It was in a sling. I couldn't move it. I couldn't lift it. It wasn't broken, but it just was in agonizing limp pain.

Notice what it says in Psalms 22.

"...all my bones..."⁷

Imagine both shoulders; imagine all the joints of the fingers. And I have no idea how incredibly painful the legs would have been.

You say, "Well, how did that occur?"

This famous cat-o'-nine-tails, the Romans who mastered the art of torture did something very unique. Yes, they had the pottery shards. Yes, they had the pieces that were designed to tear the flesh. But one of the things that they would do is that periodically through these cat-o'-nine-tails they would take lead balls and strap them within. So not only was your flesh being torn, but with the amazing tenacity of a football player, because these guys were huge, this six foot long strand of leather with a leaden ball on the end would strike His body.

It did two things. Number one, it inflicted massive internal pain. Number two, when it was swung in the scourging process, because there was weight on the end, it allowed the nine, "cat-o'-nine-tails to spread like an x," an incredible descriptive visual of what it meant to, as Matthew 27 says, to be scourged.

Now you understand why in history the average person made it eight or nine or maybe 10 at the most. Jesus is scourged. He is mocked. And, as we simply read, he made his way to Golgotha.

In that passage of Scripture, verse 35 says, "And they crucified Him."

You know, I have discovered one of the problems that we have in the 21st century is this. That it is just history. Oh, we have seen shows and there have been very vivid movies made of what we know as the passion of Christ, but often times it becomes relegated to a Sunday School lesson or a sermon or a history lesson. So I want to do something today very different and very distinct. I want you to participate in an exercise with me to try to help make the cross of Jesus real for today.

Let me share with you what we are about to do. In just a minute I am going to guide you through a visual exercise and here is what I am going to ask you to do. I am going to ask you in a moment, not yet, to actually close your eyes, okay? Everybody is going to close their eyes so nobody is looking around. Everybody is going to stay seated. And as we close our eyes I am going to walk you through a process of trying to visualize what it would this have looked like if it were to occur today in our world and our century. How

⁷ Ibid.

dramatic, how excruciating, what would it have actually appeared like in our culture to experience what these individuals did when they saw Jesus on the cross?

This will not be a long process, but it will take your cooperation and so here is what I am going to ask you to do. On the count of three just close your eyes. It is that simple and I am going to guide you through this for a few moments. Here we go, one, two, and three. Everybody close your eyes. Nobody is looking around except me.

As we have our eyes closed in this room here is what I want you to imagine. To the best of your ability imagine that you are the only person on this campus. You may have come with family. You may have come with friends. Just imagine that you are here on this church campus. It is almost as if it is deserted. As you are walking around the building and the facilities you realize that this is a different day than normal, particularly being a Sunday. And so you make your way out the main doors of the church and you begin to walk down the parking lot that is strangely empty. And you make it all the way to the hill that overlooks Highway 138. You are on that hill that has probably at least a 20 to 25 foot drop and you notice it is just like any other day. There are cars going north. There are cars going south. It is all kinds of chaos and all kinds of commotion. And you are wondering why is everything so different?

And then you realize why. You look to your right and there in the midst of the cars, in the midst of the trucks, in the midst of all of the modern stuff that we have for transportation, you see a group of people walking up the median of the highway about 50 in number and you think it is awfully strange with all that we have in our culture today. Why would people be walking up the highway, particularly in that group and that size? And they get closer and closer and you notice that they are tightly packed and you begin to notice that something is different. They are not walking to cure a disease. They are not out there for their health. This isn't an exercise program or an awareness program. You can tell that these people have an agenda. They have a purpose and something is happening in the process of coming up the median.

They get within a couple of hundred yards and you notice that all of the attention of this mob is on whoever is in the middle. You don't know who He is and you don't know what is going on. All you know is this. They are using language that should not be used in public. They are spitting. They are hitting. They are throwing rocks at Him. They are kicking dirt at Him. They obviously are very, very upset with whoever this guy is.

As they get within about 100 yards of where you are on that hill, they probably kind of fan out or thin out, so to speak, you notice that you actually recognize the guy in the middle. The only problem is He doesn't look like the last time you saw Him. This is that guy named Jesus whom everybody seems to be talking about. It is this guy who has been interviewed on the late night talk shows about how He walked on water and how He healed the lame. This is the Jesus that we seem to find an article in the paper every week about the lives that have been changed and the differences that have been made. This is the Jesus who took things that were straight and made them crooked and things crooked

and made them straight. This is the man whom everybody was talking about, everybody was curious about.

The only problem is He doesn't look like He does in the paper. He doesn't look like He does when they interviewed Him on TV. His clothes are stained with blood. There are scars all over His body. He seems to be almost in a drooped state as he is being... walking and being drug down the median.

At this point you are amazed and here you are literally in the presence of one of the most famous individuals in recent days, a man whom everybody is talking about, neighbors, coworkers, everybody. You are surprised that this group begins to make their way up the hill. They realize that you are there and they are cordial to you, but they begin a process that just mesmerizes you. As they get to the top of the hill a couple of the men take the wood that they have been carrying and they put Him in the form of what looks like a large plus sign. Then they take this Jesus, this man whom you have seen in so many different circumstances. They place Him on this piece of wood and then one of the vilest of the men, the one whose language just rang in your ears the last few moments, takes the equivalent of a railroad spike. He gradually places it on the right-hand wrist of this Jesus of Nazareth. He takes out a five-pound sledge hammer and with one quick blow he penetrates the flesh all the way into the wood and then he finishes the process. Then he systematically goes to the other hand and to the feet.

And while all this was taking place another one of the men who was vile in nature was busy digging a hole. It takes a whole crew of these men to take this large piece of wood alongside this man who is strapped to it by way of the nails. They carry Him to this hole and they take the bottom end of what looks like a large plus sign and they slam it in the bottom of the ground. When it does so the body of this Jesus vibrates on the cross, but it does not fall down. It is securely there.

You turn to look up the hill wondering what this man will do. Will he call for his lawyer? Will He call His buddies to come rescue Him with all kinds of military paraphernalia? He just looks around at those mobs of people and then He looks up to the heavens and He says, "Father, forgive them. They don't know what they are doing."

As you sit there and you stare at whatever your mind has conjured at this moment, our eyes are still closed and many your heads are bowed. You have visualized what it would look like for you to walk out the doors of this church and to see a picture of Jesus of Nazareth on the cross for you. And I am going to ask you a very honest question this morning. Can you honestly say, "I am just going to live my life the way I want to"? Can you honestly look up at what you have visualized in your mind and say, "I am just going to keep on sinning, God, I don't care"?

For those of you who are skeptical, you are curious, you doubt, can you literally look up at what you visualized and say, "It doesn't matter. It is no big deal"?

Let me tell you what a big deal the cross is. The cross is such a big deal because of what

you are visualizing right now, because the Lord has given us a mind and He has given us his Holy Spirit to help us. I realize historically the cross of Jesus took place 2000 years ago. I realize it was Romans who did it and not people here in the US. I realize it did not happen in Conyers, Georgia, but you understand that you and I have a decision to make today. As we look up in the face of Jesus as we pictured Him and we have a decision to receive Him and believe on Him, or to reject Him like we have done before.