

Week 30

Matthew series: Two sides of the Cross Pt.2

Matthew 27:45-66 (and he breathed his last)

I must resist looking at the other gospels. We should try and focus on what Matthew is trying to say. Yet, the story of Jesus death is seen clearer with all four gospels combined. Regardless, I will try hard to stick to Matthew. We have to think like a first century Jew. Almost everything in Jesus death scene is Jewish in nature. A Jewish child would have known certain verses in the Bible. Matthew goes there to perk their attention.

First, we have 3 o'clock in the day. Some say Jesus died around six pm. Yet, the scriptures point to 3 pm. I have read that the sacrifice was usually offered in the afternoon. It's by no mistake that Jesus died later in the day. Second, we have Elijah. Everyone and their dog thought Elijah would return with the Messiah. These days we are looking for the two witnesses talked about in Revelation. I believe that Jesus told them that the hour, day, or time is only known by God. We put as much stock in tradition as the Jewish community did in the 1st century.

Jesus did say that Elijah would return. He also hinted that John was Elijah. Those interpretations get a little muddled. Today, scholars are divided bigtime on when, where, and how Jesus will return. Basically, Christians are split into three camps. There is pre-tribulation meaning Jesus will come before God judges the earth, mid tribulation is during the end. While post tribulation is after those Revelation events. Either way, Matthews readers were looking for the Messiah along those lines too.

Matthew 27:45 **"From noon until three in the afternoon darkness came over all the land."**

Numbers 28:4 **"Offer one lamb in the morning and the other at twilight."**

Malachi 4:5 **"Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes."**

Remember that I said at the end of the last lesson that Matthew ends chapter 27 in silence. Why do I say that? Basically, the tomb has a stone rolled over it like the closing of a door. I can imagine the light filtering in on the linen covered body of Jesus. I have been in that area and there are tombs everywhere. I do mean everywhere. They we different sizes. Most of them had alcoves that just fit a

body snug. Meaning that tombs were not that big. So, the rolling of the stone would cut off light and sound from the outside world. Jesus lay in darkness and silence.

Back to Matthew. Why is he showing us all this scenery? Isn't it all about Jesus? It comes back to the 1st century readers. They are Jewish. They know their Bible. Matthew has spent 27 chapters preparing them for the return of the Christ. A case for Jesus, that he is that long-awaited Messiah.

That said, we have this rock over the tomb. Some at the cross talked about Elijah coming back. A few people mocked Jesus to save himself. Then we have the chief priests asking Pilate to seal the tomb. Why all this talk? Because they believed it. There was the off chance they were wrong. Wrong about God? I think wrong about Jesus. I don't think it ever occurred to them that they were killing the messiah of God. They thought Jesus was the false messiah of the evil one. Everything in the verses below was woven into the fabric of Jewish belief. A belief that their bones would rise to be taken back to be with God. Resurrection was not out of their vocabulary.

Matthew 27:63 **““Sir,” they said, “we remember that while he was still alive that deceiver said, ‘After three days I will rise again.’”**

Matthew 22:32 **“I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? He is not the God of the dead but of the living.”**

Exodus 3:15 **“God also said to Moses, "Say to the Israelites, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers--the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob--has sent me to you.' "This is my name forever, the name you shall call me from generation to generation.”**

Genesis 50:25 **“And Joseph made the Israelites swear an oath and said, "God will surely come to your aid, and then you must carry my bones up from this place.”**

See what is missing. The women were at the cross. They were at the tomb with Jesus body. Eventually they return to find Jesus missing at the gravesite. Mary, mother of Jesus was there at the cross. I just realized that the mother of two disciples John and James was there. Mary mangelin was there. Pilate has to deal with Jesus a third time. Twice with Pilate in the Luke account. This mysterious man Joseph of Arimathea is mentioned. Simon of Cyrene. Some dead Saints rose from the dead. Seems nobody is concerned about that. Yet, all within this we have no mention of the disciples. Keep this as a sticky note on your brain. Matthew will deal with the disciples and Jesus in the next chapter. Here in chapter 27 we are to focus on witnesses of death and burial.

Matthew 27:55 **“Many women were there, watching from a distance.”**

Jerimiah 29:23 **“because they have acted foolishly in Israel, and have committed adultery with their neighbors' wives and have spoken words in My name falsely, which I did not command them; and I am He who knows and am a witness," declares the LORD.”**

Read Matthew 27 again. Look up these verses. You might recognize some of the themes. Jerimiah 29, Revelation 11.

1. Let's take a quick look at the Temple. In Matthew 24, Jesus is talking with his disciples about the temple being torn down. Later Jesus is accused of saying those words. Obviously, someone heard Jesus talking to his disciples, or someone reported it to them. It's fascinating that a man asked me once if I believed that the church is a building. He was a church planting leader. He believed that the church is people and not a building. Yet, he builds churches. Here is a key to this temple talk. I was rejected by that man because of how I wanted to build a church community. Jesus was rejected because of how he wanted to build the church. Jesus said, first, I must break it down.

The people under the cross were yelling at Jesus for saying the temple will be destroyed. They did not realize that Jesus was talking about himself. However, Jesus was also talking about an event that would take place 37 years later. Think about it. Jesus mentioned that he must die and rise again. That Jonah is the only story he related. The example of the fig tree too. Israel must be crushed to make a better Israel. Then temple must die to make a better temple (church).

I have mentioned the curtain. That dividing line between God and common people in the temple was ominous. Jesus to many, is either God or a person. He either died or rose from the grave. Two sides of a curtain. One side lets you in and the other keeps you out of the presence of God. A seed dies and then it grows. Pain comes and a movement starts. The temple was destroyed several times in history if you include the original Tent of Meeting. Jesus death and the temples destruction in 70 A.D. are by no mistake.

Matthew 27:51 **“At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook, the rocks split”**

Matthew 24:2 **“Do you see all these things?” he asked. “Truly I tell you, not one stone here will be left on another; everyone will be thrown down.””**

2 Kings 25:9 **“And he burnt the house of the LORD, and the king's house; and all the houses of Jerusalem, even every great man's house, burnt he with fire.”**

2. There were so many people in and around the cross. This was the time of the Passover. Thousands of people came to Jerusalem. After the festival people went home. In the meantime, the crowds did not leave all at once. The religious rulers tried to slide Jesus death under the radar. They wanted to have him crucified after the Passover festival. Partly because it was a religious time (don't offend God). Secondly, the people loved Jesus. It might have gone the wrong way. So, they waited.

That means Simon of Cyrene was there. He was one of the masses still in Jerusalem. Clearly, some people had heard what Jesus had said about the temple. They had heard him

claiming to be the Christ. How often did Jesus ask people to be quiet about that? The triumphal entry into Jerusalem on a donkey meant something. I bet the clearing of the temple meant something too. The crowds, religious rulers, and women friends of Jesus waited at the foot of the cross. Waiting for the messiah to rise up. Instead Jesus died right before their eyes.

I want to mention Joseph of Arimathea briefly. Much has been written on him. yet, much is speculation. The Bible does have a few double incidents. One is a prostitute crying at the feet of Jesus. Another is Mary washing Jesus feet with her tears. The same scene? Earlier we have a rich young ruler talking to Jesus in private. In chapter 27 we have a prominent rich man named Joseph who wants to honor Jesus body. Same man? I don't like speculation because it leads down false claims. Yet, Matthew repeats things for a reason far too many times to just ignore the comparisons.

Matthew 27:37 "Above his head they placed the written charge against him: this is Jesus, the king of the Jews."

Judges 8:16 "He took the elders of the city, and thorns of the wilderness and briers, and he disciplined the men of Succoth with them."

3. Have you ever tried to get out of a lie? Sometimes you can and sometimes you cannot. How about getting out of a dinner or homework. Avoiding things seems to be hard work. So, here we have Pilate the governor. He hears about Jesus. His wife hears about Jesus. I bet everyone wanted a piece of the miracle man. The teacher and prophet. I suspect Pilate wanted to avoid Jesus. Jesus meant trouble between Rome and the community.

In those days. A governor was replaced often. A small rebellion would look badly on the man assigned to keep the peace. It's the middle of the night. A crowd of religious rulers come with a bound troublemaker named Jesus. I'm betting they woke up Pilate. Then he realizes who it is. I bet he became stressed in an instant. Pilate wanted nothing to do with this mess. He tries to let Jesus go but the crowds wanted none of it. His wife pleaded with him to let Jesus Go. Pilate tried to offer another option to the crowds. Yet, they refused, wanting Jesus to be crucified publicly. Won't this just go away?

So, Pilate washes his hands of the matter. It's all over and forgotten. Then comes another knock on the door at night. Can't a man get any sleep? It's Joseph of Arimathea. I could hear him saying to his wife "what does he want?" Then Joseph asks for the body of Jesus. Right, of course. Pilate just wanted this to end and grants the request. Then there is another knock at the door a few days later. It's the religious rulers. They want an armed guard at the grave of Jesus. Poor Pilate. Washing his hands of a problem did not work.

Matthew 27:62 "The next day, the one after Preparation Day, the chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate."

Isaiah 66:4 "So I will choose their punishments and will bring on them what they dread Because I called, but no one answered; I spoke, but they did not listen and they did evil in My sight And chose that in which I did not delight.""

4. Let's talk about three days. So much has been written to unravel the three days. Why was Jesus buried for three days? Is there any significance to it? Basically, it goes like this. A Jewish person traditionally was buried soon after they died. Jesus is special because people generally did not die the first day on a cross. Joseph of Arimathea did it quickly. The women perfumed Jesus quickly. Jesus' life was silenced quickly and quietly by the religious rulers.

There was nothing special about Jesus' death. Crosses were common. A quick burial was common. His placement in a cave is extremely common. Yet, I feel three things are going on with this common death. One, is that Jesus died. There is nothing to dispute he did not die. People have said he did not die, but the Bible says he did. Secondly, Prophecy is fulfilled. The religious rulers knew their Bible. They were scared of Jesus. What if this man was God? They knew Hosea 6. They knew that resurrection was possible. They were in the promised land. So, they wanted a guard posted. Matthew points out that the Pharisees were there and not the Sadducees. Why? Because the Pharisees believed in the resurrection. Someone did not want Jesus to rise from the dead.

Finally, we have Jesus' predictions. They had all heard them. The temple being torn down. The sign of Jonah. The Son of man must die and be raised to life. One side of the cross is killing the God man. The other side of the cross was preparing him to rise from the dead. A Jewish burial was preparing them to rise one day by preserving the body. A guard and stone were there to keep the body in. So, they thought...

Matthew 27:64 **"So give the order for the tomb to be made secure until the third day. Otherwise, his disciples may come and steal the body and tell the people that he has been raised from the dead. This last deception will be worse than the first."**

Hosea 6:2 **"After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him."**

1 Corinthians 15:4 **"That he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures."**

What it means?

There are two sides to the cross. Matthew has spent 27 chapters showing us two sides. The one side is the witness. We witness Jesus' ministry. We hear his words. We listen to his teachings and parables. Some saw his miracles and actions. I bet the disciples saw many things. I know his mother did too. People saw him die. Then we have the other side. Many people tried to make sure the body was gone. Some buried it. Others wanted him to stay buried. This whole time there is Jesus heading to and from a cross. Seemingly between life and death.

What it means is that people tried to contain the uncontainable. They wanted Jesus to be silent. They wanted him to make no claims. He was arrested, beaten, and crucified to make him silent. All that time they wanted him to admit what he claimed. Then on the other side they wanted the body to remain dead. People wanted the silence to remain. From the religious rulers to Pilate, they wanted it to be over. Things needed to be normal in a volatile Roman rule.

There is a saying that the Spirit will stand. How does a spirit stand? Do we pray on our knees or standing up? Is God in heaven or in everything? How do you contain a divine being? Rosa Parks set off a movement by being arrested. Joseph Mandela set off a movement by being arrested. Jesus set off a movement by being arrested. Can you see a movement? Containing the Spirit of God is ridiculous.

Matthew 27:50 **“And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit.”**

John 12:24 **“Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.**

2 Corinthians 3:17 **“Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.”**