

Masterwork of the Messiah

Expositional Study Of Matthew's Gospel

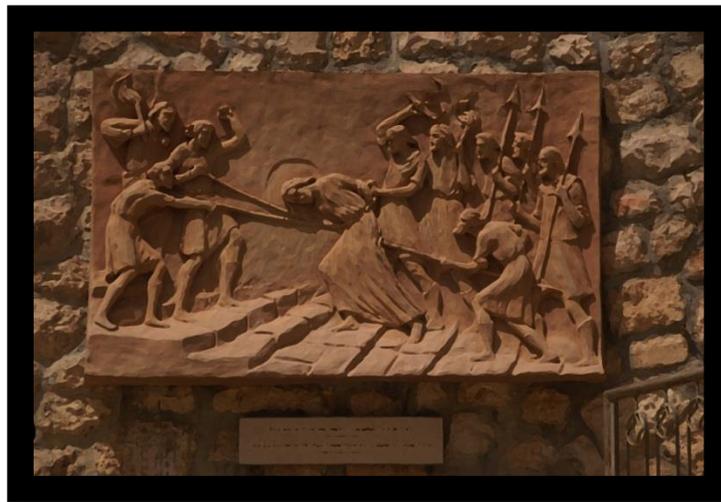
His Pain, Your Gain? Part 1

Matthew 27:27-44

Written By

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In the crucifixion narrative, as detailed in Matthew 27, we come face to face, not just with the horror of the death of Jesus, we see the thematic climax of this particular gospel. Writing to Jews to convince them that Jesus was, in fact, the Messiah, the former tax collector turned devout disciple, showcases the key purpose of Christ's anointed, prophesied life: *To die for the sins of mankind so forgiveness and eternal life could be potentially secured by those who turn to Him in faith.* Carefully and artistically, this beautiful, wonderful thread appears throughout the book, from the angelic birth announcement that this unique Son would save His people and secure divine forgiveness from their sins (Matthew 1:21), to His words at the first communion service detailing that His blood, or more precisely, His death would establish a new covenant wherein sinners could find "forgiveness of sins" (Matthew 26:28). The historical record of His death at the hands of His Roman executioners simply represents the zenith of this divine plan and prophecy (Matthew 16:21; 17:22-23; 20:17-19; 26:2). Jesus, therefore, came down so that we could have the opportunity to go up. Jesus physically died so that we might have the opportunity to spiritually live.

The personal, pragmatic question, then, is clear. Based on His redemptive work on the cross, based on the false charges which led to His unjust capital punishment, based on the

degradation and hatred He experienced on that lonely windswept hill, based on His divine desire to die as our sin-substitute, it must be asked:

Is His Pain, Your Gain? (Matthew 27:27-44)

There is no middle ground, as Jesus articulated early on in His ministry (Matthew 12:30, “*He who is not with Me is against Me; and he who does not gather with Me scatters*”). Our relativistic, we-lovingly-embrace-the-notion-that-all-religions-are-equal world, wants us to believe Christ is the one spiritual option among other viable options; however, such is not what He communicated in His teachings and in the purpose and plan of His crucifixion. He came to be THE Savior, not a Savior (1 Timothy 4:10: “*For it is this we labor and strive, because we have fixed our hope on the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of believers;*” 1 John 4:14: “*And we have beheld and bear witness that the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world*”). Ostensibly, this means His death on that cross for your sin either humbles and moves you to bow, in faith, before that cross to secure His divine forgiveness and life, or you, for a variety of reasons and rationalizations, walk away from that cross. So, I must ask you again, “Is His Pain, Your Gain?”

From this inspired narrative of Christ’s death, coupled with that of the other gospel writers, we readily see there are various answers to the query. Look at them closely and thoughtfully for you just might see yourself, and if you do, then, please realize the time is ripe ... and short ... for you to make a life-changing, positive faith decision regarding Christ’s desire to go to that cross for the sinful likes of you and me.

Moving into the story of what happened to Jesus on that fateful and fearful Passover day, we not only are given a graphic, emotionally moving description of what He endured to pay the penalty for our sin, we encounter various responses to that salvific work, responses which are still among us today.

The Clueless Ones (Matthew 27:7-31, 33-37)

The spiritually clueless ones were the Roman soldiers of Christ’s scourging and crucifixion detail. They were probably from various realms of the Empire, meaning they probably had absolutely no clue about the person and work of Jesus. The fact they were stationed in Caesarea on the coast (north of modern day Tel Aviv) and just happened to be the Antonia Fortress with Pilate, the Governor, merely underscores the point Christ would have just been another Jew to them, and they hated Jews, by definition. So, when it came to scourging Jesus per Pilate’s orders, they merely methodically carried them out with no personal axe to grind, per se. They were just doing their job, as they had before.

²⁶ Then he released Barabbas for them; but after having Jesus scourged, he handed Him over to be crucified.

D.A. Carson, the gifted New Testament scholar, describes the Roman method of scourging well:

²⁶ Among the Jews scourging was limited to forty lashes (Deut 25:3; cf. 2Cor 11:24), but the Romans were restricted by nothing but their strength and whim. The whip was the dreaded *flagellum*, made by plaiting pieces of bone or lead into

leather thongs. The victim was stripped and tied to a post. Severe flogging not only reduced the flesh to bloody pulp but could open up the body until the bones were visible and the entrails exposed (cf. TDNT, 4:510-12; Jos. War II, 612 [xxi.5]; VI, 304 [v.3]). Flogging as an independent punishment not infrequently ended in death. It was also used to weaken the prisoner before crucifixion.¹

Additionally, I would add that two lictors worked the accused over, hitting him on the left and right sides alternatively in a downward motion. The amount of blood loss from this beating led to eventual circulatory shock, not to mention severe pain associated with underlying skeletal muscles being exposed to the air.

If you saw Mel Gibson's, *The Passion Of The Christ*, then the unmerciful brutality of this whipping is burned in your mind. The theological nature of it is also ever before you, too. Who cannot help but ask yourself in humble wonder, "He, the innocent One and He the Lamb of God, did this for me?" This answer from heaven will always be a resounding and loving, "Yes, I did that for you, even if you were clueless to my identity and the reason for my trip to earth."

Immediately after the scourging, Matthew tells us what happened next:

²⁷ Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole Roman cohort around Him.

A Roman legion was composed of roughly 5,500 men. Within the legion there were 10 cohorts. One cohort was the largest, with around 750-800 men, while the other nine had, according to Goldsworthy's *The Complete Roman Army*, around 480 men apiece. The first cohort was broken down further into five centuries, comprising 150 men, and the other nine cohorts had six centuries, containing 80 men apiece. Pragmatically, this means around 480 heavily armed soldiers surrounded one innocent, defenseless, helpless Jew, Jesus. I'm sure the Devil and his minions were high-fiving themselves at this moment. "Now, we have Him cornered," must have been the thinking. They thought wrong. Jesus had them and sin cornered, as the soldiers prepared him for crucifixion:

²⁸ They stripped Him and put a scarlet robe on Him. ²⁹ And after twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on His head, and a reed in His right hand; and they knelt down before Him and mocked Him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" ³⁰ They spat on Him, and took the reed and began to beat Him on the head.

First, they removed all of Christ's dignity by stripping His bleeding body, and then they mocked Him by placing a scarlet robe, which was probably from a given soldier's clothing, on His tender shoulders. Someone grabbed some strands of the crucifixion bush which readily grows in the area, and they wove a menacing crown of thorns out of it to mock Him for claiming to be a king. I'm sure they had the wreathlike crown which adorned Ceasar on their coinage when they made this particular crown; however, this crown was meant to create pain for the one who'd dare claim status equal to their supreme, "divine" ruler. In complete ignorance of Christ's identity as their Creator and the God over everything seen and unseen (Colossians 1:16-17; 2:9), as was

¹ D.A. Carson, Expositor's Bible Commentary

certainly validated time and time again with His miracles, they laughingly jeered and made fun of him as they took turns bowing and saying, “Hail, King of the Jews!”

Shocking, isn't it?

- They had no clue He gave His back to their scourging as prophesied, and that He was in total control of the brutal moment, not them (Isaiah 50:6).
- They had no clue that the scarlet robe would one day be replaced by a royal robe on the shoulders of Jesus as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords (Revelation 19:16).
- They had no clue the scarlet easily typified the sin that God said in the Old Testament He could cleanse and make as white as snow (Isaiah 1:18).
- They had no clue that the thorns of that crown merely represented the thorns which originated from the curse of sin in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:18), thorns He had come to die for and do away with.
- They had no clue that the crown of thrones they wove would one day be replaced by a regal crown called a diadem (Revelation 6:2).
- They had no clue how their mocking of the Messiah fulfilled many ancient prophetic texts about how He would be treated at the end of His redemptive life (Psalm 35:15-16; 69:19-20).
- They had no clue that one day the tables would be turned and He would mock them (Psalm 2:4; 37:13).
- They had no clue that it wouldn't be long before they'd be bowing before His eternal throne to give account of their lives and actions (Philippians 2:10-11).
- They who spit on Him, had no clue He was the One who could take His spittle and use it to give a blind man new eyes (John 9:6).
- They had no clue that the worthless wood scepter they beat His broken body with would one day be replaced by a rod of iron in His holy hand as the great Davidic King and Messiah (Revelation 19:15).

Yes, they were just like so many today: spiritually clueless regarding the identity and the mission of the Master, Jesus. To them, He was just another Jewish religious nut. To them, He was just another Jewish insurrectionist. To them, He was just another Jewish convict who needed to be dispatched so they could render the iron-fisted justice of the mighty Roman Empire.

Once they were finished with their godless, heartless game, Matthew tells us what they did next:

³¹ After they had mocked Him, they took the scarlet robe off Him and put His own garments back on Him, and led Him away to crucify Him.

The crucifixion site, according to Jewish law, had to be outside the gate and wall of the city (Numbers 15:32-36), and according to Roman tactics it needed to be in a location where many could witness it for maximum crime deterrent. Theologically, I'd also add that the sin sacrifice had to also be offered outside the gate (Leviticus 4:1ff). Jesus, of course, was this sacrifice. Additionally, if we go with Gordon's Calvary as the site, then the painful, sorrowful walk (“the way of sorrows” is the translation of the *Via Dolorosa*, the traditional path of Christ from the

fortress to the Church of the Holy Sepulcher) from the Antonia Fortress was maybe a mile through the congested market streets of Jerusalem.

The horizontal beam of the cross called the *patibulum*, weighing between thirty to forty pounds, would have been placed across the raw, gouged shoulders of Christ, and the arms of the accused were typically tied to it.² Four soldiers armed with spears and shields, then, formed a box around each of the convicted with Christ leading the way, giving us a crucifixion detachment of twelve soldiers total. A small board painted white, containing the charges against the accused was held by one lead soldier for each of the accused, and it was eventually nailed to the upright vertical beam of the cross. In Latin the sign was called the *titulus*. A centurion led the way to the crucifixion site.

Slowly Christ marched toward the hill of Golgotha. With each step His muscles screamed in pain, His lungs searched for air, and His vision kept being obscured by blood coming from the crown of thorns. All along the way, He kept quiet as a little lamb, while Passover worshippers lined the streets to either see what was happening, or to hurl insults at Him. After what probably felt like eternity, the crucifixion detail reached their deadly destination. Matthew relates what occurred:



³³ And when they came to a place called Golgotha, which means Place of a Skull, ³⁴ they

gave Him wine to drink mixed with gall; and after tasting it, He was unwilling to drink.

The drink was a narcotic, composed of wine and myrrh (Mark 15:23), designed to dull the senses of the accused for what was about to happen. Christ refused the drink because He had told the Father, while in prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, He would drink all of the cup of His wrath against sin (Matthew 26:39; John 18:11). It is interesting, however, that myrrh was involved because this substance was used in Israel to anoint priests (Exodus 30:23), and one of the magi had given to baby Jesus at His birth. Why myrrh? It was used for embalming purposes (John 19:39). A fitting substance for the Savior who had come to earth to die for our sin. Its presence here merely pointed to the essence of His life's work: redemption through His substitutionary death.

³⁵ And when they had crucified Him ...

Matthew does not present the mechanics of the crucifixion, but we shall for instructive purposes.

² Alfred Edersheim, *Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981): Book 2: 593.

The vertical beam was laid down on the ground in front of the prepared hole for its footing. I'm sure the repeated sound of the hammer hitting the steel sent a repeated shudder through the crowd. Jesus was, then, situated on a small, wooden seat called the *sedile or sedulum*.³ His hands were nailed to the crossbar, his legs were bent and a spike was driven through His feet between the second and third metatarsals. Regarding the placement of the nails in Christ's hands, we read from the JAMA article *On The Physical Death Of Jesus Christ*, by William Edwards, MD, Wesley Gabel, MDiv, and Floyd Hosmer, MS, these insightful medical words:

It has been shown that the ligaments and bones of the wrists can support the weight of a body hanging from them, but the palms cannot. Accordingly, the iron spikes probably were driven between the radius and carpals or between the two rows of carpal bones, either proximal to or through the strong bandlike flexor retinaculum and the various intercarpal ligaments. Although a nail in either location in the wrist might pass between the bony elements and thereby produce no fractures, the likelihood of painful periosteal injury would seem great. Furthermore, the driven nail would crush or sever the rather large sensorimotor median nerve. The stimulated nerve would produce excruciating bolts of fiery pain in both arms. Although the severed median nerve would result in paralysis of a portion of the hand, ischemic contractures and impalement of various ligaments by the iron spike might produce a claw-like grasp.⁴

All of this was designed to maximize the pain of the event as the accused. Jesus, could momentarily rest on this seat, before he painfully pushed on the nails in his feet to get much needed air into his lungs. One cannot even begin to image and comprehend the brutal, painful nature of this type of death. Once this process was complete ropes were used to pick the cross up and drop its base into the dark hole. The jarring motion must have created pain off the charts for Christ. The process of death by crucifixion had now begun for Jesus and the two criminals to His left and right.

After an unknown elapse of time, the spiritually ignorant soldiers did the unimaginable:

... they divided up His garments among themselves by casting lots. ³⁶ And sitting down, they began to keep watch over Him there.

The four soldiers rolled knucklebones, the equivalent of modern day dice, to determine who received which part of Christ's five Jewish garments. They were most greedily interested in His seamless outer cloak for this could fetch some money, so they rolled the "dice" to see who would get it. All of this is most instructive, isn't it? The knucklebones were typically fashioned out of sheep bone, and the various edges had different numerical values as they rested against the earth. Again, theologically, one cannot miss the relationship just between the dice of sheep bone, and the bone of the Lamb of God exposed on the cross (Psalm 22:13, 17).

³ It is possible the soldiers did not attach a seat because that would have prolonged His life, and they, based on the influence of the Jewish Sanhedrin, knew they had to be finished before sundown ... or the start of Sabbath.

⁴ William Edwards, MD, Wesley Gabel, MDiv, and Floyd Hosmer, MS, *On The Physical Death Of Jesus Christ*, JAMA, March 21, 1986, Vol. 255, No. 11, page 1460.

We cannot miss just how clueless these soldiers really were. There hanging on the cross above them was the God-man, the Savior, Jesus, the Christ. He hung there for their sin, not His. He hung there out of love for them. He hung there so that sin could be atoned for and covered once and for all. He hung there suffering and they were distracted with gambling. He hung there with a sign they crafted which was really the essence of truth:

³⁷ And above His head they put up the charge against Him which read, "THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS."

He was the King, but they cluelessly crucified Him and passed the time away they usually did while on a boring duty assignment. They gambled. And while they gambled, Luke informs us that Christ, despite all of his personal pain, uttered His first words:

³⁴ Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing (Luke 23).

What a Savior. They played around His blood-stained cross, but He prayed for them. What love.

In light of the actions of these soldiers, I have but one question for you today: Are you clueless toward the person and work of Jesus Christ? More precisely, are you so distracted by all this life has to offer you just don't give Him much thought? Are you so out of touch with your own spirituality, or any spirituality for that matter, that you react negatively, even harshly (brutally in some cultures) against Christians who tell you the story of the Savior? Our world, really, our worship center, has its share of spiritually ignorant Roman soldiers. I have a flash of crucifixion insight for you right now: Jesus, the God of glory, died on the old rugged tree for your sin, not His. He died so that you, the clueless sinner bound for hell, might become the clued-in saint bound for heaven. So, I posit the question more precisely since so much is at stake: Is His pain your gain?"

A second response to the redemptive work of Jesus is found in the encounter Jesus had with a man on the way to Golgotha. I call this man ...

The Conflicted One (Matthew 27:32)

Matthew introduces us to this man in one, short verse:

³² As they were coming out, they found a man of Cyrene named Simon, whom they pressed into service to bear His cross.

Simon, who was probably a Jew because the name is Jewish, was from Cyrene, or Libya on our geographical grid. Why was he in Jerusalem this particular day? He had probably saved up his money for a once in a lifetime spiritual pilgrimage to Jerusalem for Passover. All he wanted to do was get to the Temple to enjoy the service of all services, and now the streets were jam-packed with morbid people looking at a crucifixion detail, resulting in his inability to move at all. So he stood still until the condemned walked by.

The first man was hard to look at. He was beaten beyond recognition, His eyes were almost swollen shut, his back was ripped open and muscles were exposed, dried blood adorned His entire body, a sharp stickery crown was embedded in His head, and with each painful step

the accused wobbled and swayed from side to side under the weight of the wooden beam across His shoulders. Then it happened. The accused swayed one way and when He tried to recover His weakened legs couldn't keep His body balanced. With a loud thud, the crossbeam hit the stone street as the accused took a knee. In seconds, the Centurion sized up the situation and motioned for a soldier on the outer perimeter to jab Simon on the shoulder with a spear. He knew what this action meant: "Hey, you. Step out here and pick up this beam and carry it until we tell you to drop it."

Was Simon pleased to pick up the beam? Would you have been? Probably not. But he didn't have any choice because any Roman soldier could mandate anyone to work for him at any time. So, without hesitation, Simon stepped forward. Don't you know he looked Christ in the face as he grabbed the rugged, splintery beam? Don't you know that was a look he'd never forget? Those were not the eyes of hate, but of love. Those were not the eyes of a criminal but of the Savior. Those were not the eyes resentment, but contentment. Those were the eyes of true, lasting Shalom, peace.

Other than what little bit of evidence we are given for Simon in the gospels (Mark 15:21; Luke 23:26), we don't have much specific information about Simon. Did he just drop the crossbeam on Golgotha and walk away and get on with his busy day? I doubt it. In Mark's parallel account in chapter 15 we encounter an interesting and enlightening parenthetical statement:

²¹ And they pressed into service a passer-by coming from the country, Simon of Cyrene (the father of Alexander and Rufus), to bear His cross.

Why would Mark, under the direction of Peter, add the names of these two brothers if they were, in fact, not believers? Obviously, they were both known to the church in Rome, where Peter was located at the time. Paul's words to the Roman church in Romans 16 are equally intriguing:

¹³ Greet Rufus, a choice man in the Lord, also his mother and mine.

Who was Rufus? The son of Simon, and Paul likens him unto a great man of God. I do not think it is too much of a stretch to say that these two brothers became godly Christ-followers because one day their father just happened to pick up a cross for a criminal on His way to His death by crucifixion. That one look into His eyes, that lonely trip up the rough road walking behind the wobbly man who didn't complain for one moment about his lot, that last view of Him resting on the tree as if He was destined to be there, all of this, coupled with all of those shouts from the jeering crowd that this was supposedly the Messiah, the Son of God, put the seed of the gospel in his soul. I think it was a seed he took home and planted in the lives of his wife, whom Paul viewed as his own mother because they were so close, and in the lives of his two sons. That chance encounter wasn't chance after all. It was divinely ordained so that Simon the sinner could become Simon the saint.

In light of Simon's story, I have thought I must put to you. The fact that you are sitting here listening to this sermon or reading this message is no cosmic fluke. The fact you are where you are today is not by chance. The fact your life this week brushed up against a real, live saint as you commuted to work, or purchased a home, or went to a soccer practice with your daughter is no fluke. On the contrary, your intersection with the gospel story as relayed by those who

know the Savior, is the Lord of glory reaching out to you to come and take up your cross and follow Him by faith into eternity (Matthew 8:35; Luke 14:2).

As with Simon, you might only get one chance like this in a lifetime. Seize the moment, then. Simon did and he and his family were never the same, and for the last 2,000 years I'm sure they've had their time around the Lord's glorious throne giving Him glory through word and song.

The last group we encounter in this part of our passage are what I'd classify as ...

The Cruel Ones (Matthew 27:38-44)

These were the religious people who just happened to be passing by Golgotha that day on their way to Passover. These were the professional priests who had Jesus finally where they wanted Him: on a cross to die. These were religious people who had heard Jesus teach in Israel, and were astonished at His knowledge, passion, and courage to say what needed saying. These were religious people who had seen many of His divine miracles. These were religious people who had stood in long lines with sick family members so He could heal them. These were religious people who had hailed Him as the messianic king a week before, but now were convinced He wasn't the king because He had unfortunately wound up on a cross at the hands of the Romans. Matthew brings them into fine focus with this painful paragraph:

³⁸ At that time two robbers were crucified with Him, one on the right and one on the left. ³⁹ And those passing by were hurling abuse at Him, wagging their heads ⁴⁰ and saying, "You who are going to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross." ⁴¹ In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking Him and saying, ⁴² "He saved others; He cannot save Himself. He is the King of Israel; let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe in Him. ⁴³ "HE TRUSTS IN GOD; LET GOD RESCUE Him now, IF HE DELIGHTS IN HIM; for He said, 'I am the Son of God.'" ⁴⁴ The robbers who had been crucified with Him were also insulting Him with the same words.

It's hard to imagine the ruthless nature of their mocking accusations to One crucified on a tree, waiting for death while battling for each breath in the hot sun. Mark this well. Some of the most dangerous, ruthless people in the world are those who erroneously embrace a false religion and think they are doing God a favor by ardently and openly opposing Christ and Christianity.

Their charges were fourfold but unfounded:

- ⁴⁰ "You who are going to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save Yourself!" That was a lie. He never said he'd destroy the Temple and then rebuild it in three days. He did, however, speak of raising the Temple of His body in three days. The religious opponents of the faith are adept at misquoting and misusing Scripture for their own nefarious purposes.
- ⁴¹ "If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross." He was the Son of God. His virgin birth substantiated this. The voice of the Father at His baptism gave further proof. John and Peter recognized Him as the Son of God in relation to His miraculous ability (Matthew 16:16; John 1:34). His plethora of miracles

unequivocally proved His deity and sonship. The fact the demons confessed His sonship proved His identity (Matthew 8:29). He was the Son of God and it is a good thing He didn't come down from that cross. Had He come down, we would not have been given the opportunity to go up. But still, the super-spiritual religious people questioned His identity, just like the Devil had in the wilderness (Matthew 4:3, 6).

- ⁴² *“He saved others; He cannot save Himself.”* He had saved many people, especially from physical maladies and the religious leaders were witnesses of the facts but they still chose to disbelieve (Healed the paralyzed man, Matthew 8:5-13; healed the paralytic in front of the scribes, Matthew 9:1-8; healed the two blind men everyone knew, Matthew 9:27-31; healed the man blind from birth under the noses of the Pharisees, John 9; and they still willfully chose to reject the evidence for His person and purpose. He could have saved Himself, but He wanted to save us. Thank Him for not giving into the taunt of these wicked, arrogant, and brutal religious men.
- ⁴² *“He is the King of Israel; let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe in Him.”* He was the King of Israel. One both sides of His family line He was, and is, tied to King David (Matthew 1). He was the Davidic King as prophesied (Isaiah 9:6), and He could have come down from that cross if He so chose. But that would have terminated His divinely appointed mission: first to be our Savior (Isaiah 53), and then to be the King (Isaiah 61:1-2). These men, like so many purely religious people, chose to pick and choose what texts they wanted to hear and follow and to reject those texts and evidences which countered their false version of religion and spirituality.
- ⁴³ *“HE TRUSTS IN GOD; LET GOD RESCUE Him now, IF HE DELIGHTS IN HIM; for He said, ‘I am the Son of God.’* These blind religionists, who were utterly convinced that Jesus couldn't be the Messiah because He was in that cross, had no idea that in three days the Father would rescue Him by delivering Him from the grave, thereby, making Him the ultimate victor over sin and death.

How blind these men were. They loved the form of religion, not the God of religion. They loved the control of religion and not the Christ of religion. They loved their rituals, their traditions, the religious pedigree, and so forth at the expense of all evidence to the contrary as presented by the person and work of Jesus Christ. Even the two godless criminals got in the evil act of mocking Jesus, even in the face of their imminent death by crucifixion. Who says hatred toward Christ is not contagious?

⁴⁴ The robbers who had been crucified with Him were also insulting Him with the same words.

Their inflammatory words toward Jesus are absolutely jaw-dropping. Are you part of this cruel crowd? Worldwide it's a large, seemingly ever-growing group.

What is even more jaw-dropping is what happened to one of those sharp-mouthed thieves. Somewhere between 9 a.m. and noon, he went from effacing Christ to embracing Christ. Luke tells us what happened:

⁴⁰ But the other answered, and rebuking him said, “Do you not even fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? ⁴¹ “And we indeed are suffering justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.” ⁴² And he was saying, “Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!”

One short little prayer request from the mouth of a wicked man who had probably never asked God for anything. How Christ responded as life ebbed from His body is nothing short of moving and stunning:

⁴³ And He said to him, “Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise.”

Because one cruel man bowed his sin-stained soul at the foot of the God-man on the middle cross, that day he traded earthly life for heavenly life in a place called Paradise. Sometime that afternoon as his life left him Christ's pain had, in ever since of the word, become his gain ... for all eternity.

That same Savior who took the nails for you wants you to be in Paradise with Him too. It doesn't matter if you are Clueless One, or a Conflicted One, or a Cruel one ... there is room at the cross for you. A song called *The Nails In Your Hands by Mercy Me* puts the work of Jesus for us in perspective. Let it minister to you if you know Him, and if you don't know Him, may it be the song which introduces you to Him and ushers you into Paradise.