

Matthew 27D

- Today we move another step ahead in the story of Jesus' death on the cross on Passover
 - Jesus has been condemned by Pilate in the Antonian Fortress, and in short order, Jesus will be nailed to a wooden cross
 - Matthew's account moves extremely quickly through these events often giving just a single verse to a significant moment
 - The other Gospel writers fill in the gaps, of course, and we will venture outside Matthew here and there as needed
 - But I want to remain true to the Gospel we're studying, so we will largely stick with the text of Matthew
 - I also want to remind you of the three areas of focus for our study of Jesus' suffering and death
 - First, we want to understand as best we can what Jesus experienced on our behalf
 - Secondly, we want to understand the purpose and meaning of these events...that is, why did they happen this way?
 - Finally, we want to pay close attention to the timeline of events so we can dispel any myths or incorrect understanding
 - Today we pick up at v.32, and immediately you'll notice right away how much Matthew packs into a single verse

Matt. 27:32 As they were coming out, they found a man of Cyrene named Simon, whom they pressed into service to bear His cross.

- Matthew moves directly from Pilate's condemnation of Jesus to Jesus with His cross headed to his execution site outside the city walls
 - This is the only verse Matthew devotes to that entire journey, and because he jumps so quickly, I want to slow down just a bit
 - First, let's get oriented...Jesus is leaving the Antonian Fortress where Pilate condemned Him before the crowds

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- The fortress is located inside the city walls on the northern end of the Temple
- The crucifixion site sat on a small hill just outside the walls to the west/northwest of the city
- The historical path Jesus took doesn't exist any longer since the city has been destroyed and rebuilt several times since Jesus
 - But today there is a memorial path called the Via Dolorosa (Way of Suffering in Latin) that roughly retraces Jesus' path
 - Except if you walk the Via Dolorosa today you'll notice that it begins and ends *inside* the city walls
 - Naturally, this confuses some people because we know that Jesus was crucified *outside* the city walls
- The current path lies entirely inside the city because the current walls around the old city of Jerusalem are not the original walls

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- The walls of Jesus' day enclosed a smaller area that placed Jesus' burial site outside the city just to the west
- A decade or so after Jesus died, the walls were greatly expanded by King Agrippa to encompass Jesus' burial site into the city
- The Romans destroyed the city walls in the revolt of AD 70 and centuries later the Ottomans rebuilt walls in the 1500s
 - The Ottoman walls enclose a smaller area than the Roman walls, but they still encompass Jesus' burial site
 - So now Jesus' burial site is inside the city walls and is marked by a magnificent church built by Constantine in the 4th century

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- The actual distance from the Fortress to the crucifixion site is about 500 meters or so, which is about a quarter mile
 - An average person can make a walk that distance in about 15 min
 - But given Jesus' debilitated state following the beatings and a scourging, He would have found this walk to be an ordeal
 - And adding to that difficulty considerably, Romans forced the condemned to carry their cross to the crucifixion site

- The Romans used any one of four different cross designs for crucifixion so we can't be sure the type of cross used in Jesus' day
 - Based on certain details in the story, the traditional "t-shaped" cross was likely the one used for Jesus
 - And if so, then Jesus would have carried only the horizontal cross beam to the crucifixion site
- The beam would be placed across the person's shoulders and tied to his arms for the walk
 - The beam wasn't especially large or heavy...just large enough to support the person's weight
 - But Jesus was in no condition to carry anything, so this task was quite difficult and we see the evidence in v.32
- In v.32 we're told that as soon as Jesus picks up His cross and begins to the walk, He falls
 - Right away the Roman guards realize Jesus can't make it to the crucifixion site on His own, so they conscript a nearby passerby to help
 - Matthew says they chose a man named Simon from Cyrene, a place in northern Africa, who was in Jerusalem for the Passover
 - Like the rest of the crowd, Simon was likely there to see the national Passover Lamb sacrificed in the temple at 9 AM
 - But now he is required by the guards to follow Jesus for the entire walk to the crucifixion site carrying the wooden beam
 - Here's another opportunity for us to correct a common misconception about Jesus' death
 - Jesus didn't carry His own cross except for a brief moment at the very start of the journey
 - For the most part, Jesus walked to His death carrying nothing because he could barely manage the walk at all
 - And for Simon, being forced to carry Jesus' cross was much more than an inconvenience; he was now a participant in the horrors of crucifixion
 - Though Simon wasn't nailed to the cross, he shared in the abuse that Jesus endured on the way there

- As an accused walked to his execution site, he traveled through densely packed crowds in narrow city streets
- These crowds pressed in on the man jeering at him, hurling abuse, spitting on him, throwing objects and even beating him
- In such tight and chaotic quarters, anyone near Jesus would have found themselves in the crossfire
 - Although the abuse wasn't intended for Simon, those misdirected rocks, spit and punches still landed with a sting
 - And the closer Simon walked with Jesus, the more of the abuse came his way
- At the same time, Simon's role also gained him the benefit of a front row seat to witness Jesus' personal suffering
 - Matthew doesn't record any details from the journey to the cross, but the other Gospel writers record one notable moment
 - John and Luke tells us that following Jesus were women wailing loudly over His predicament
 - But these women were not truly lamenting Jesus' fate, and in fact, they probably didn't even know Jesus
 - These women were professional mourners who wailed and lamented for income
 - In Jewish culture it was considered dishonorable for someone to die without someone expressing sorrow for them
 - This expectation gave rise to professional mourners, who wailed for those who lacked enough friends or family to mourn them
 - Family members of the deceased would compensate them for their work in honoring their relative
 - When Jesus sees these women mourning for Him, He knows no one will pay them, so He offers them compensation in the form or advice:

[Luke 23:27](#) And following Him was a large crowd of the people, and of women who were mourning and lamenting Him.

[Luke 23:28](#) But Jesus turning to them said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, stop weeping for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children.

[Luke 23:29](#) "For behold, the days are coming when they will say, 'Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never nursed.'

[Luke 23:30](#) "Then they will begin TO SAY TO THE MOUNTAINS, 'FALL ON US,' AND TO THE HILLS, 'COVER US.'

- Jesus offers these women a warning prophecy concerning the coming judgment on Jerusalem
 - He tells them to save their crying for their own children at the time of the future destruction of their city
 - This judgment came against Jerusalem for their rejection of Jesus, and it came to pass as promised in AD 70
- So as Simon followed closely behind Jesus, he experienced moments like this and perhaps others that aren't recorded in the Gospels
 - At the very least, Simon witnessed the way Jesus handled these unbearable circumstances, including noticing what Jesus was *not* doing
 - Normally, a convicted criminal headed to the cross was in no mood to be pleasant or kind with the abusive crowd
 - So as the crowd hurled insults and rocks, the condemned man would return the favor by screaming obscenities at the crowd
 - Jesus responded so differently, even showing concern for women who pretended to mourn Him, that it must have puzzled Simon greatly
 - Jesus never uttering an insult against anyone involved in His death, no cursing, no crying even
 - Jesus accepted the abuse willingly, as we studied earlier, and certainly it would have made an impression on Simon
 - So if Simon walked closely with Jesus, he saw and heard remarkable things but staying close to Jesus also meant enduring more abuse too
 - On the other hand, if Simon dropped back to leave space between himself and Jesus, he lessened the abuse he received
 - But if he did that, Simon also experienced less of Jesus, heard less of Jesus' word and witnessed less of Jesus' behavior
 - And I wonder what mattered most to Simon in that moment?

- I think the Lord arranged for Simon to walk with Jesus so we would have an example of how our walk with Jesus brings both sacrifice and blessing
 - The closer we walk with Jesus, the more we will suffer as He did, because as Jesus said, they hated Him first, so they will hate us too

John 15:18 “If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you.

John 15:19 “If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you.

- The world loves its own, and for the same reason the world hates God because God convicts the world for ungodliness
- And if the world hates God, then it will also hate anything or anyone who represents God
- And since we have been chosen by God to be His ambassadors, then Jesus says we have become enemies of the world
 - Therefore, the closer we walk with Jesus, the more we look and sound like Jesus to the world, so the more the world will hate us
 - We’re like Simon walking closely with Jesus, carrying our cross as Jesus told us to do
- As we walk we will be subject to the same hatred and abuse directed against Jesus
 - But when that happens, they aren’t hating us...they’re hating Jesus and God...we’re just collateral damage
 - Also like Simon, we can lessen the abuse if we distance ourselves from Jesus, fading back in our walk, blending into the crowd, etc.
- But of course, if we do that we also lose the experience of walking with Jesus, watching Him at work and hearing His word
 - We can’t have it both ways...we can’t walk closely with Jesus and avoid the negative consequences that naturally follow
 - Christians can’t be friends with Jesus and friends with the world

[James 4:4](#) You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

- So this man was enlisted into the story of Jesus' death to remind us that Christ desires followers who are willing to be identified with Jesus
 - Interestingly this man is named Simon, the same name as Jesus' chief disciple Peter, whose original name was Simon
 - We have one Simon present that day following Jesus to the cross, while the other Simon, the rock, was notably absent
 - I wonder what if Peter had been present that day, might he have carried the cross instead of Simon of Cyrene?
 - After all, Jesus assigned Simon Peter the responsibility for leading the early church and for setting the example for everyone else
 - Peter was the rock upon which Jesus would start building His Church, and yet where was Simon Peter now?
 - That Simon was hiding somewhere trying to avoid the abuse that was falling on Jesus, while this Simon took his place
 - Which is a reminder that if we won't walk with Jesus and serve Him, Jesus will find someone else who will
 - When we fail to walk with Jesus, He doesn't lose out...but we do
 - There are marvelous, amazing and sometimes challenging things you will experience following Jesus...
 - And I'm not just talking about coming to faith in Jesus...I'm talking to the believer who has faith but is following at a distance
 - You don't know what you're missing
 - And one final thought...Simon followed Jesus, suffering along the way, but he didn't suffer the death that Jesus did
 - Once he made his way to the cross, Simon was free to go...he just walked away
 - Jesus stayed behind to die that day, which reminds us that even as we follow Jesus, He still takes our place when it matters most

- Jesus took the death Simon deserved and that we deserve
- And that's why our walk with Him will never bring us to a place where we have to pay for our own sins...that payment was made once for all
 - Yes, we are called to bear a cross of service to Jesus, of identity *with* Jesus and of suffering *for* Jesus
 - But He bears the marks of the cross and suffered for us so that we won't have to suffer in eternity
- So Jesus makes His way to the execution site with Simon following...

[Matt. 27:33](#) And when they came to a place called Golgotha, which means Place of a Skull,

- As Jesus exits the city gate He quickly reaches a rocky outcrop called Golgotha located only a few meters outside the walls
 - The name is an Aramaic word that Matthew translates for us as "place of a skull" which refers to the fact that Romans executed many people here
 - Prisoners carried the horizontal beam of the cross to this point, and then their crucifixion would begin
 - In typical Roman fashion, the process happened very quickly and very brutally
 - First, the condemned was forced to lie down with arms outstretched on the horizontal beam and thick iron nails were driven through the wrist
 - In John's Gospel, we are told Jesus had wounds in His "hands" but in the ancient world the word "hand" also referred to the wrist
 - Since we know the palm is not strong enough to support the weight of the person, the nail must have gone through the wrist
 - As the nails penetrated the wrist, it severed ligaments and nerves, causing shooting pains and involuntary contractions of the fingers
 - Then the horizontal beam was raised with a hoist or ropes and the person was lifted by their outstretched arms
 - As the body weight hung from the outstretched arms, one or both shoulders were likely dislocated

- A dislocated shoulder is an intense pain all by itself, made worse by the pain of the body pulling against the nail in the wrist
- The horizontal beam is then nailed to the vertical beam, and the man's feet are nailed one on top of the other to the vertical beam
 - The feet are positioned so that the knees are bent, which was another Roman innovation to extend the suffering of crucifixion
 - While hanging in this position, the man's diaphragm can't expand the chest cavity, so the person can't breathe
 - Leon Morris describes the experience this way:

To breathe, it was necessary to push with the legs and pull with the arms to keep the chest cavity open and functioning. Terrible muscle spasms wracked the entire body; but since collapse meant asphyxiation, the strain went on and on. This is also why the sedecula [a piece of wood that served as a small seat in some cases] . . . prolonged life and agony: it partially supported the body's weight, and therefore encouraged the victim to fight on.

- According to Mark, Jesus is placed on the cross on the third Roman hour of the day, which is 9 AM on our clock
 - This began the first of three divisions of time on that day, and the first division runs from 9 AM to noon (12 PM)
 - From 9 AM until noon, Jesus is suffering from the actions of mankind
 - Sinful men put Jesus on a cross that day, and sinful men are tormenting Jesus as He hangs
 - This three-hour period serves the purpose of Jesus experiencing the consequences of sin, not His own but of ours
 - Spiritually speaking, each of us put Jesus on the cross that day, and if you think you would have done better in that day, think again
 - There is nothing fundamentally different between us and the people who mocked and tormented Jesus that day
 - They are sinners, we are sinners; they hated God, and apart from the grace of God, so would we

- I assure you that had you been a first century Jew in Jerusalem that day, you would have spit on Jesus too
- Jesus will now hang until He dies, and the typical cause of death in crucifixion was asphyxiation or shock from exposure
 - The prisoner would weaken over time and eventually lose the strength to push themselves up for a breath, and the process could take days
 - Here again, the Romans wanted to prolong the agony, so they offered the prisoner vinegar to drink throughout the ordeal
 - Near the end Jesus will say He was thirsty and He will drink a little then
 - But the Romans did make concession to mercy: they offered a prisoner the chance to drink a potion to help with the pain

Matt. 27:34 they gave Him wine to drink mixed with gall; and after tasting it, He was unwilling to drink.

- This combination of gall with wine potion had a slightly anesthetic effect which helped cut the pain of the experience somewhat
 - But notice Jesus refuses this drink, and He does so because He was not supposed to avoid the pain of the cross
 - Quite the contrary, the point of this experience as we learned earlier was for Jesus to experience suffering full force
 - He was there to suffer for our sake, and so He refuses to take anything that might decrease His suffering
- Finally, as Jesus hangs Matthew tells us that the Roman guards assigned to watch the prisoners that day begins profiting from the work that day

Matt. 27:35 And when they had crucified Him, they divided up His garments among themselves by casting lots.

Matt. 27:36 And sitting down, they began to keep watch over Him there.

- Roman soldiers were often paid in spoil, either from conquests in war or from prisoners they oversaw
 - Prisoners were crucified completely naked as a further act of shame, so their clothing was left for others to take

- There were multiple guards assigned to the duty that day, and each would receive something
- Typically, a person in that day wore an outer garment, inner garment, head covering, sandals and a heavier outer coat
- These items had varying value, and the coat fabric, which was the most useful, was often torn into pieces and shared among the men
 - But Jesus' tunic was seamless, according to John, which means it was a more expensive robe usually worn by the upper class
 - Jesus probably received it as a sacrificial gift from some follower, and these Romans don't want to ruin it by dividing it
 - So they throw lots or dice to see who will get it
- Why is that little detail included in the Gospels? Primarily for the same reason many other such details were included...
 - Because they all are fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy
 - For example, listen to this description of the crucifixion in the Psalms

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[Psa. 22:11](#) Be not far from me, for trouble is near;
For there is none to help.

[Psa. 22:12](#) Many bulls have surrounded me;
Strong bulls of Bashan have encircled me.

[Psa. 22:13](#) They open wide their mouth at me,
As a ravening and a roaring lion.

[Psa. 22:14](#) I am poured out like water,
And all my bones are out of joint;
My heart is like wax;
It is melted within me.

[Psa. 22:15](#) My strength is dried up like a potsherd,
And my tongue cleaves to my jaws;
And You lay me in the dust of death.

[Psa. 22:16](#) For dogs have surrounded me;
A band of evildoers has encompassed me;
They pierced my hands and my feet.

[Psa. 22:17](#) I can count all my bones.

They look, they stare at me;
[Psa. 22:18](#) They divide my garments among them,
 And for my clothing they cast lots.

- David describes the experience of Jesus on the cross, though David knew nothing of what that experience would be like
 - When David wrote that psalm, crucifixion wasn't known...it wasn't invented until the Persian empire centuries later
 - This is God giving David and us a preview of what was coming for Jesus and doing it in a way that validated Jesus' ministry
 - Starting in v.11 he says there was none to help, and as we know Jesus had no allies present apart from a few women and John
 - Then in v.12 many bulls of Bashan surrounded Him referring to the Roman soldiers
 - A Bashan bull often pictures the most powerful of warriors or enemies in Scripture which is an apt description of Rome
 - Next he says the people opened their mouths at Jesus roaring at Him with insults and jeers like lions
 - And Jesus felt as if His life was being poured out of His body as He was scourged and beaten and nailed to the cross
 - Next in v.14 He says His bones are out of joint, referring to His shoulders separating from hanging on the nails
 - And His heart is like wax melting in the sense that He can feel His heart weakening and fading under the stress and loss of blood
 - His strength is sapped, His mouth is dry and His tongue sticks to His mouth
 - All these symptoms perfectly match a crucifixion experience
 - And then Jesus says dogs surround Him, and dog was the Jewish preferred term to describe a Gentile...another reference to Romans
 - This band of evildoers has surrounded Jesus at His feet as He hangs above them, referring again to Roman soldiers

- And then notice in v.16 these same ones are responsible for piercing His hands and feet...just as the Romans did
- How do we explain a reference to piercing hands and feet centuries before crucifixion was invented except by God
- Finally, vs.17-18 say none of Jesus' bones were broken, and that too will be confirmed in the Gospel account
 - And that they (the dogs) cast lots for His clothing, dividing them among themselves just as we studied
 - These little details are included in the Gospel story to point us back to these prophecies so we will know Jesus is the Messiah
- That's how God reveals Himself to people...by giving us details to connect Scripture in such a way that we find the answers God has hidden for us
 - Think back one more time to Simon the Cyrene...
 - Mark writes in his Gospel that Simon was the father of Rufus
 - He gives his Roman readers that detail as if Mark expected them to recognize the name and understand the connection
 - Later in Paul's letter to the church in Rome, he also mentions a Rufus, who was a believer living in that city
 - So perhaps Mark wanted us to connect Simon's experience with Jesus to the faith of Simon's son, Rufus, to show us the impact of that moment
 - Specifically, it seems Simon's experience that day changed him, bringing him to faith in Jesus and he passed that along to his sons
 - I wonder if Simon saw and heard things that day that reminded him of Scripture like Psalm 22
 - Somehow in that moment Simon came to realize that this wasn't an ordinary man dying that day but the Promised One of Israel
 - That's why details in Scripture matter, it's why we study it the way we do, so that faith may come to those who hear the word
 - And that for those of us following behind Jesus, our confidence and trust in the word of God may grow