

A Symbol of Love

The King Has Come

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It goes along with what we are going to be talking about today as we continue our study in the gospel of Matthew and that is the cross of Christ, which in reality for us that have been saved by his grace, is a great symbol of his love.

If you are visiting with us today, we have been in the gospel of Matthew for a while. In fact, some people ask, "How long have you been in Matthew?" And this is how long. This is Matthew popping out of my Bible this morning in the chapter we are actually in.

But in that great, great gospel, Christ is presented as King. And the irony today in our study of Matthew's gospel is that he will be going through a mock coronation as a king. Yes, they will give him a crown, but it is a crown of thorns. Yes, they will give him a scepter, but they will actually take that scepter and beat him over the head. They will scourge him. They will mock him. And ultimately they will crucify him.

He will fulfill the very mission for which he came to planet earth and that was to die for sinners. And we are grateful for that today.

And I must confess to you this morning that as I go through this text, it is very emotional. I don't know how you can respond in any other way if you truly know Christ as your Lord and Savior as you see his sufferings and what he went through for us in bearing our sin, in becoming our sin offering. I don't know how that we can be moved.

But the reality of the matter is this. We need to be more than moved. Our wills need to be affected, not only responding emotionally, but with our minds and our wills to take up our cross and follow Christ and deny ourselves. That is what we are called to do in following our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

For, you see, he paid much too high a price for me in tears and blood and pain to have my soul just stirred at times and never really change. Because you deserve a fiery love that won't ignore your sacrifice. Why? Because you paid much too high a price.

We sang a hymn this morning, *And Can It Be?* At the end it says, "Amazing Love, how can it be that thou my God should die for me?" That is amazing. It is incredible. I can't fathom it.

Paul would say to the Ephesians in Ephesians 3:19, “And to know the love of Christ that passeth knowledge,” that would go all the way through verse 21. To know the love of Christ that passeth knowledge, that we might be filled with all the fullness of God.

Well, in our study of Matthew today we will be looking at verses 27 through 35 and I trust that our hearts will be touched and the response will be a greater commitment to him, the love and sacrifice for him, to carry his cross and to lift him up in who he is.

Let’s stand as we read the Word of God together.

Matthew 27:27-35 please.

Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole Roman cohort around Him. And they stripped Him, and put a scarlet robe on Him. And after weaving a crown of thorns, they put it on His head, and a reed in His right hand; and they kneeled down before Him and mocked Him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" And they spat on Him, and took the reed and began to beat Him on the head. And after they had mocked Him, they took His robe off and put His garments on Him, and led Him away to crucify Him. And as they were coming out, they found a man of Cyrene named Simon, whom they pressed into service to bear His cross.

And when they had come to a place called Golgotha, which means Place of a Skull, they gave Him wine to drink mingled with gall; and after tasting it, He was unwilling to drink.¹

The first six words of verse 35.

“And when they had crucified Him...”²

Let’s pray.

Holy Father, as we think of the cost of the cross this morning, that great symbol of your love in mercy and sovereign grace, we vow in our hearts before you to worship you, our great God. For, Lord, as we have sung this morning you are worthy to receive glory and honor and power. For you have created all things and for thy pleasure they have been created. Oh Lord, may we bring you much pleasure. May we fulfill the very purpose for which you have created us, to ascribe glory and honor and praise to your holy name, to be lights of our Savior in this dark world, being living sacrifices unto you.

Father, as we study this text that is very emotional for us that are in Christ, we would ask, Father, that we could step beyond that to having our will affected, that, Lord, there

¹ Matthew 27:26-34.

² Matthew 27:35.

wouldn't be just an emotional response today, but a response for the mind and the will submitting to you afresh and anew to the one who is Lord, master of all creation, sovereign, supreme, solitary God, holy, holy, holy God. We bow in our hearts before you asking that your Spirit would be our teacher now, that he would open our eyes that we might behold wondrous things out of your Word, that our hearts would be touched and changed. And for those who are here today without Christ I pray that you might call them to yourself, quicken them from the dead and enable them to believe, that you might grant the gift of repentance and faith in their lives. This is our prayer in Jesus' name. Amen.

You can be seated. Thank you.

Most religions and ideologies have a symbol which illustrates a significant feature of its history or beliefs. For example, the lotus flower is associated with Buddhism. It is their sign or symbol of their false religion. Modern Judaism has adopted the so called shield or star of David as its symbol. And then Islam, the other monotheistic faith which arose in the Middle East, a false faith, is symbolized by a crescent.

And even certain ideologies have their symbols which represent their movement. One was the Marxist hammer and sickle, adopted in 1917 by the Soviet government from a 19th century Belgian painting. It represents industry and agriculture. And they were crossed to signify the union of workers and peasants, of factory and field. Another symbol of ideology is the swastika and at the beginning of this century it was adopted by some German groups as a symbol of the Aryan race. Then Hitler took it over and it became the sinister sign of Nazi racial bigotry.

Now my point is many religions and ideologies have symbols that represent their movement, their cause or what they believe. Well, Christianity is no different. Since the second century, the symbol of Christianity has been the cross.

Now, to some that would seem rather unusual, rather bizarre for in Roman times a cross meant one thing, death, execution. It was the lowest form of capital punishment reserved for slaves and non Roman citizens during the Roman Empire. That is what early believers wanted to identify with.

Although there were a wide range of possibilities for a symbol of Christianity. For example, Christians might have chosen the crib or manger in which the baby Jesus was laid or the carpenter's bench at which Jesus worked as a young man in Nazareth dignifying manual labor, or the boat from which Jesus taught the crowds in Galilee, or the apron he wore when washing the apostles' feet which would have spoken of his spirit of humble service.

Then there was a stone which having been rolled from the mouth of Jesus' tomb would have proclaimed his glorious and victorious resurrection from the death. Other possibilities were the throne, symbol of divine sovereignty which John in his vision of

heaven saw that Jesus was sharing, or the symbol of the dove, the symbol of the Holy Spirit sent from heaven on the day of Pentecost.

And my point is any of these seven symbols would have been suitable as a pointer to some aspect of the ministry of our Lord. But, instead, the chosen symbol to signify those who know Christ would be the cross. Early Christians wished to commemorate as central to their understanding of Jesus neither his resurrection nor his reign, his gift of the Spirit, but his death, his crucifixion.

So the cross is a symbol of Christianity and rightly so. For in many ways the cross is the crux of the New Testament. On it turns the whole of the gospel message and the entirety of the Christian life.

Christian scholar Stephen Neal said in *A Christian Theology of History*, “The death of Christ is the central point of history. Here all the roads of the past converge, hence, all the roads of the future diverge. And, beloved, the cross is a pivot as well as the center of New Testament thought is the exclusive mark of the Christian faith. And I can say that boldly because that was the perspective of Jesus on his death. I mean, despite the great importance of his teaching and his example and his great miracles, none of these were central to his mission, would dominate his mind was not the living, but the giving of his life.

The final sacrifice was his hour which he talked about several times for which he had come into the world to do the will of the Father. The four gospel writers knew the importance of this for they gave a great amount of space in their gospels to the story of this last few days on earth, his death and resurrection.

In fact, these events occupied between a third and a quarter of Matthew, Mark and Luke, while the gospel of John has two parts: the book of the signs and the book of the passion. And John spends an almost equal amount of time on each.

So the cross is central to the New Testament writers, to early believers and to our Lord. And, beloved, to me it is the greatest, the greatest symbol of God’s love and mercy.

In commenting about that Oswald Chambers said, “The bedrock of our Christian faith is the unmerited, fathomless marvel of the love of God exhibited on the cross of Calvary, a love we never can and never shall merit.”

Andrew Murray said of the cross, “The cross of Christ does not make God love us. It is the outcome and measure of his love for us.”

And, beloved, that should be a motivation to every person here today for one of two things. Number one, for those who known not Christ as their Savior and Lord for conversation, for salvation, that you would turn from your sin today and commit yourself to Christ, to follow him. And, number two, for you who know him, our response clearly

should be commitment, that the love of Christ would compel you to a life of holiness and service.

And to challenge us in those two areas I want to look at the symbol of God's love today, the title of our message. And I want to look at the cost of the cross as we study Matthew 27:27-35. We will look at just two things this morning under that title. Number one, the crowning of Jesus in verses 27 through 30 and, number two, the crucifixion of Jesus in verses 31 through 35.

With that in mind, look at verse 27 where we will start to see the crowning of Jesus, our first point today, Matthew 27:27, please.

“Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole Roman cohort around Him.”³

Now keep in mind as we look at verse 27 that Jesus had already received a scourging which is recorded in verse 26 which we looked at last week in our study. But in review, look back at verse 26.

“Then he released Barabbas,” talking about Pontius Pilate, “for them;”⁴ the crowd, those that were hollering out, “Crucify him, crucify him.” “But after having Jesus scourged, [and] delivered [over] to be crucified.”⁵

He released Barabbas, but not Jesus because the crowd was hollering out for Jesus, “Crucify him, crucify him.”

But in the process of that crucifixion he would be scourged. Now I told you last week that a Roman scourging was done by an instrument called a flagrum which you hopefully can see on the screen. A flagrum was a short whip consisting of several heavy leather thongs with small beads of lead or bone chips attached near the ends of each. And this heavy whip would be used 39 times or to a point where the prisoner was thought to be near death and would be used across the victim's shoulders, his back and his legs. It was a terrible, terrible form of punishment. In fact, sometimes the body was torn and lacerated to such an extreme that deep seated veins and arteries and sometimes even organs were exposed. Sometimes the scourging would even result in death.

Well, Jesus here goes through a scourging.

Now after the scourging of Christ, the soldiers of Pilate take Jesus into a common hall where there is a whole band of soldiers according to verse 27. And a band of soldiers, a Roman cohort in that day did this approximately with 600 soldiers. So that common hall had to be a big place.

³ Matthew 27:27.

⁴ Matthew 27:26.

⁵ Ibid.

Now these soldiers were Roman Legionnaires, who, for the most part, were not Italian, not Romans. For Rome generally conscripted soldiers out of countries it occupied. And in Israel the Romans frequently used Syrian soldiers because they could speak Aramaic which was the common language of Israel. So the majority of Rome's soldiers were not necessarily Roman, but they reflected Roman military power and they reflected Roman military presence.

Now I tell you that to show you that these soldiers were probably not familiar with Jerusalem and everything that went on at Passover time in all of its religion. And, to them, Jesus was just another prisoner who claimed to be a king.

Now, they knew that Jesus claimed to be a king from what the people screamed about him. Remember, just a few days before this, as he comes into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, "Hosanna. Hosanna in the highest."⁶ They also knew the people, though, had turned and now wanted him dead.

So they saw him as a fake and a fraud thinking he was mentally deranged and worthy of their mockery, especially being led on by the crowd at this time.

And that leads us to verse 28. Look at verse 28, please.

"And they stripped Him, and put a scarlet robe on Him."⁷

Now, beginning at verse 28 the soldiers start a mock coronation, ridiculing Jesus as a king. And, first of all, they stripped him, probably by removing a robe that had been placed upon him after his scourging.

Now imagine the pain from that. For he had been bleeding from the scourging. And, no doubt, the blood would clot to the robe. And they strip it off of him kind of like pulling a Band-Aid off a fresh wound or surgical bandages off an incision. It would be very, very, very painful.

But not only that, but the humiliation of being naked would be painful. He is in front of 600 other men. And, folks the same of nakedness came in with sin in Genesis 3:7. And therefore Christ when he came to satisfy for sin, to be the propitiation for sin and take it away was made naked and submitted to that shame so that one day he could give us white robes to cover the shame of our sin and our spiritual nakedness.

It says in Hebrews 12:2, "Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame."⁸

And so the shameful act. This is what he had to go through.

⁶ Matthew 21:9; Mark 11:10.

⁷ Matthew 27:28.

⁸ Hebrews 12:2.

Beloved, I want to remind you this morning that Jesus did not enjoy the cross. Hebrews 12:2 says he endured the cross. He would endure the cross for his people, those he would come to save effectually. And he would go through that.

Now after they stripped cross, they started to give him mock symbols of a king. And, first of all, they put a scarlet robe on him, quote, clothing for a king. But it doesn't stop there. It goes on.

Look at verse 29, please.

“And after weaving a crown of thorns, they put it on His head, and a reed in His right hand; and they kneeled down before Him and mocked Him, saying, ‘Hail, King of the Jews!’”⁹

Now, the word “weaving” or “platted” in the King James Version here means woven together. So they wove together parts of a thorn bush to make it look like a crown and put it upon Christ's head, no doubt driving it down into his head piercing his brow and more blood started to flow.

Now after they put a crown of thorn on his head, they put a reed in his right hand. And the right hand is the symbol of authority. And the reed symbolized a king's scepter. And the soldiers put that common stock in Christ's hand to mock his authority. And this is, no doubt, what they were doing for on Roman coins in that day the image of Tiberius Caesar, the Roman Emperor, was shown holding a scepter, showing his power and authority.

So what are they doing in essence? They are mocking Christ? But they continue this mockery by bowing the knee before him as they would do that in that day to a sovereign, to a king. And they say, “Hail, King of the Jews.”¹⁰

And that is ironic because one day every knee will bow to him as the sovereign of the universe, as King of kings and Lord of lords.

Paul, as he writes to the Philippians will say in Philippians 2:9, 10 and 11:

Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.¹¹

⁹ Matthew 27:29.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Philippians 2:9-11.

Now one day everybody is going to do that. And to think that they would do that in a mocking way in that day because what we have right here is God almighty himself, God tabernacled in a body, the Lord Jesus Christ and they are mocking him that way. They are bowing the knee to him as a king to mock his authority.

The mockery goes on. Look at verse 30, please.

“And they spat on Him, and took the reed and began to beat Him on the head.”¹²

Now the ultimate human indignity is to be spit upon.

I remember years ago, before Roberto Alamar became a Cleveland Indian he spit on an umpire as he was a Baltimore Oriole. Some of you might remember that. He was mad at the call, mad at the authority that was over him and to show his disagreement of that authority, he spit on him in disrespect to that authority.

Well, this was not the first time that Jesus had been spit upon. Did you know that? For the Jewish leaders spit upon him already in our study in Matthew 26:67. Now the Romans do the same thing. First the Jews, now the Romans. And after that they take the reed that they had given to him as a scepter and hit him over the head with it, making a joke of his authority and no doubt driving the crown of thorns deeper down in his skull.

And the result of the trials that he went through, the Jewish trial, the Roman trial, three phases of each, the mockery, the scourging would be what was prophesied in Isaiah 52:14.

The NIV says: “Just as there were many who were appalled at him— his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any man and his form marred beyond human likeness.”¹³

“His visage was so marred more than any man, his form more than the sons of men,”¹⁴ it says in the King James Version in Isaiah 52:14.

Now, folks, the amazing thing to me is this. Through going through all of that, the mockery, the shame, the beatings, the amazing thing to me is that throughout all this Jesus said nothing and never retaliated. He was willing to suffer for sinners, not only the death of the cross, but everything that came with it as well. Because of that, the cross is set before us as a motivation when we are hurt and discouraged, when we are downtrodden and hurting in a big time way to look at Jesus, because the Bible says in Hebrews 12:3, “For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.”¹⁵

¹² Matthew 27:30.

¹³ Isaiah 52:14.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Hebrews 12:3.

The word “faint” has to do with quitting, giving up, losing heart. And we all go through times like that. Some of you are hurting big time today over different circumstances. But our focus needs to be drawn back to Christ and we need to be reminded of what he went through for us on Calvary’s cross. And that is the motivation for us to keep on keeping on for him, to seek first his kingdom, to be living sacrifices for him. That is our motivation to go on rather than become bitter when we are treated unjustly. And that happens at times in our lives. People are misrepresented and they are hurt. People tell lies about them. What do we do?

Well, what did Jesus do? Well, the Bible says in 1 Peter 2:22 and 2:23:

Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously.¹⁶

So what is our motivation to go on? The cross? What is our motivation to forgive? The cross. What is our motivation to have a clear conscience? The cross. What is our motivation to serve? That great love. I mean, “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends,”¹⁷ John 15:13. But I remind you that in Romans five we were not his friends. We were his enemies, dead in our trespasses and sins, blind, death. We could not even respond to him because, “men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.”¹⁸ We were heading on the road to hell. That is what we wanted. We wanted our sin until the Lord quickened through his Word and through his Spirit our hearts and made us alive, Ephesians 2:1-5, and quickened us by grace because through grace you are saved, by grace you are saved.

So we respond.

So I say in the love of Christ that next time you are treated unjustly, think about that. But when it is hard to forgive remember Jesus uttering from the cross, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.”¹⁹ That is important for us when we have been treated unjustly or hurt.

And I want to tell you. Sometimes we can be hurt so deeply and even by other believers. And we hurt. But, beloved, we must look at the cross and “Consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.”²⁰

We need to continue to take up our cross and follow him.

¹⁶ 1 Peter 2:22-23.

¹⁷ John 15:13.

¹⁸ Romans 3:19.

¹⁹ Luke 23:34.

²⁰ Hebrews 12:3.

Well, this is the crowning of Jesus, verses 27 through 30, which leads us to our second and last point today, the crucifixion of Jesus beginning in verse 31, please.

“And after they had mocked Him, they took His robe off and put His garments on Him, and led Him away to crucify Him.”²¹

Now in verse 31 Matthew tells us that after they ended their mockery of Christ they took the scarlet robe off of him that they had put on and then put on his own clothing and led him away to crucify him. Now they led him away because executions had to take place outside of the city of Jerusalem. Why? Because the Jews didn't want it to be defiled.

In fact, Hebrews 13:12 says that Jesus suffered outside the gate, outside of the gate of Jerusalem. Mosaic law required that all executions occur outside the city walls in Numbers 15:35. So they led him away out of Jerusalem to crucify him.

Now William Barkley gives us some interesting background about crucifixion. And he tells us historically that crucifixion originated in Persia and its origin came from the fact that the earth was considered to be sacred to Ormuzd—O R M U Z D—a pagan God so the criminal was lifted up from the earth that he might not defile the earth which was God's property. That was their logic. That was their thinking.

Now from Persia, crucifixion passed to Carthage in North Africa. And it was from Carthage that Rome learned of it and I might add, perfected, made it a means of suffering that is mind boggling.

Now, the Romans used crucifixion extensively. In fact, at the time of Christ and during the era of Roman occupation in Israel, the Romans crucified at least 30,000 people, 30,000 Jews I might add. And they would do it out along the highways to warn people of what happens to someone who violates Roman law. I mean, crucifixion was a vivid illustration of the consequences of opposing Rome. So they led Christ out of Jerusalem to crucify him.

Now look at verse 32, please.

“As they were coming out, they found a man of Cyrene named Simon, whom they pressed into service to bear His cross.”²²

Now according to John chapter 19 verses 16 and 17 we know that Jesus began the procession down what is called the *Via Della Rosa* by carrying his own cross. There is a picture of the *Via Della Rosa*, just a small road proceeding through Jerusalem. And there is nothing in Scripture that says Jesus carried only part of the cross. Some think he carried just the cross piece, the cross bar. Some think he carried just the center piece. Personally, I believe he carried the whole thing. And a full cross weighed in excess of

²¹ Matthew 27:31.

²² Matthew 27:32.

200 pounds which was an incredible weight for someone in his condition to carry. In fact, the cross bar alone weighed 80 to 125 pounds.

Now, as the procession came out of the city from the *Via Della Rosa* it was apparent that Jesus' strength was giving out. One man I was studying pointed out that he believed—interesting to me—that Jesus was the strongest man who ever lived because he lived without sin.

In other words, there was no defilement in his body, a perfect body. Therefore it would have been all that God intended an undefiled body to be, not defiled by sin. But even given that, Jesus' strength ran out. Why? His blood was draining away. The agony he endured is beyond belief. For up to that time he had no sleep since the night before.

He had been betrayed by Judas, remember that? All the emotion involved in that. And he witnessed the defection of 11 other disciples that he had invested over three years of his life in. He had undergone the injustice of the trials. Again, two of them, a Jewish trial, a Roman trial in three phases of each. He endured the humiliations that followed and then the scourging and beating totally taxed his strength.

So they find a man who is along this processional, along the *Via Della Rosa*, a man of Cyrene, Simon and they conscripted him to bear his cross.

With that in mind look at verse 33 please.

“And when they had come to a place called Golgotha, which means Place of a Skull...”²³

Now the place they were taking Christ to crucify him was a place called Golgotha which literally means, “the skull place.”

Now Luke in his gospel called this place Calvary which literally means cranium. Soon you will be able to see, you can see now a picture of that place. And both of them were talking about the same place, a hill right outside of the north part of Jerusalem that has the shape of a human skull or cranium in it. It is called Golgotha. It is called Calvary, again, as you can see the picture.

Now look at verse 34, please.

“[And] they gave Him wine to drink mingled with gall; and after tasting it, He was unwilling to drink.”²⁴

Now the drink that the soldiers gave to Christ at this place, vinegar wine mingled with gall or myrrh has Mark records it, was given as a sedative to the victim before crucifixion. And in doing this the soldiers were not, I repeat were not show compassion. The soldiers didn't look on the drugging of the victim as an act of mercy. They didn't

²³ Matthew 27:33.

²⁴ Matthew 27:34.

care if the victim suffered or not. But what it did was the drugging accommodated them. Because it was difficult to hammer four nails through someone's limbs if he weren't drugged to some degree. It would make it difficult for them. So they would give vinegar mingled with gall to settle them or drug them for a short time that they could proceed with pounding the nails.

Now we know that sometimes in crucifixion they would actually wrap the person with leather thongs. But the issue was we know that Jesus was nailed, why? Because when he appeared to Thomas, what did he show him? Pierce marks, right? The pierce marks. So this is what happened.

But notice that Jesus refused this. He would not drink because he was not going to allow any of his senses to be dulled. He was committed to enduring the full pain of the cross to be the sin offering.

Now look at the first six words of verse 35. We will only cover these words and pick up here, Lord willing, by God's grace next week.

“And when they had crucified him...”²⁵

Now Matthew states, “And when they had crucified him...”²⁶

And he doesn't give the details of the crucifixion. But let me take a moment to give you a few to give you some understanding of what Christ endured on the cross, not to sensationalize it, but give you the reality of what really happened. There was no glamour. It was not a polished cross. It was an old rugged cross.

Now in crucifixion, number one, the Roman soldiers would lay the cross on the ground and place the victim on it. In this case they placed Christ on it. Then they extended his feet, pulling his toes down. Then they drove a large nail through the arch of the foot and then to the arch of the other foot. These nails were probably square shaped, iron nails about seven inches long and 3/8ths of an inch in diameter, similar to modern railroad spikes.

Now they extended his hands allowing his knees to flex a little. Then they drove the two more nails through his wrists just below the heel of each hand. They couldn't put them through the palms because the flesh would tear.

Now once the soldiers nailed Christ to the cross they lifted him and dropped it into a hole they dug. And sometimes the impact would rip the person off and the procedure was carried out again, lifted up, there is a hole there, throw it in the ground and all the things that went along with that.

²⁵ Matthew 27:35.

²⁶ Ibid.

If they weren't recrucified, even if they remained on the cross the initial shock of the impact caused great pain. It has been well said that the person who was crucified died 1000 deaths.

Now among the horrors which one suffered while suspended on a cross was severe inflammation. The swelling of the wounds in the regions of the nails, unbearable pain from torn tendons, fearful discomfort from the strained position of the body, throbbing headache and burning thirst all accompanied what the person was going through that was crucified.

So Christ was crucified. Slowly he begins to sag down more and more with his weight, being held by the nails running through his wrist, excruciating pain shot up his arms.

Now to try to relieve the pain, the Lord pushed up on the two wounds on his feet. Well, that caused even more pain and hour after hour he endured a wrenching, twisting trade off as he tried relieving the pain and gasping for breath. For most cross victims died of suffocation. That is why they would break the legs of the two thieves that were on each side of Jesus.

Now you and I know medically someone is not going to die from having their legs broken. But this was called crucifraction. And what they would do is they would break the legs below the knee so the individual who was on the cross could no longer push up to breathe.

And, of course, John chapter 19 verse 31 communicates it was a high sabbath. They couldn't keep the thieves on there. Jesus had already dismissed his spirit, but they broke their legs to speed up death for them, crucifraction.

And, of course, for Jesus he finally dismissed his spirit and died and said, "It is finished."²⁷

And now you understand somewhat the expression for the suffering of death in Hebrews 2:9.

"But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death."²⁸

Beloved, Jesus' death was a suffering death physically and it was a suffering death spiritually for he felt the curse of sin. He felt the total agony of sin for all eternity put together, compressed together in a few hours, all the punishment for all the sin of his people was his. He became a sin offering. So not only is there the physical pain that is beyond imagination and what led up to that pain, but also as Jesus would become the sin offering.

²⁷ John 19:30.

²⁸ Hebrews 2:9.

In conclusion this morning I want to make three applications. According to John Stott and his book on *The Cross*, the cross of Jesus Christ enforces three truths about ourselves, about God and about Jesus Christ that we need to ponder.

And I quote what our response should be, what we should see in application. First, our sin must be extremely horrible. Stott said, “Nothing reveals the gravity of sin like the cross. For ultimately, what sent Christ there was neither the greed of Judas nor the envy of the priests nor the cowardice of Pilate, but our own greed, envy, cowardice and other sins and Christ resolved in love and mercy to bear their judgment and so put them away. It is impossible for us to face Christ’s cross with integrity and not feel ashamed of ourselves. Apathy, selfishness and complacency blossom everywhere on the world today except at the cross. There these weeds shrivel and die. They are seen for the catty, poisonous things they are. For if there was no way by which the righteous God could righteously forgive our unrighteousness except that he should bear it in himself in Christ, it must be serious indeed, that God would make his Son to be sin for us, the one who knew no sin that we would be made the righteousness of God in him, 2 Corinthians 5:21. It is only when we see this that stripped of our own self righteousness and self satisfaction we are ready to put our trust in Jesus Christ as the Lord and Savior we urgently need.”

Number two, secondly, God’s love must be wonderful beyond comprehension. Amazing love. God would quite justly have abandoned us, could have justly, I should say, abandoned us to our fate, hell. He could have left us alone to reap the fruit of our wrong doing and to perish in our sins. It is what we deserve. But he did not. Because he loved us he came after us in Christ, the seeking Savior.

You could see we understand before our salvation we didn’t seek him. He sought us, right? There is none that understand. There is none that seeks after God. We seek his benefits. But we don’t seek him. We run away from him. We run away from the light in our deadness, in our depravity. So he must seek us out. He must call us, enable us in our deadness to be able to come to him and he pursued us even to the desolate anguish of the cross where he bore, believer, our guilt, our sin, our judgment, our death.

And do you know what? It takes a hard and stony heart to remain unmoved by love like that for it is more than love. Its proper name is grace, mercy, which is love to the undeserving. And, beloved, that is what kept Jesus on the cross, not the nails, not the nails.

Thirdly, Christ’s salvation must be a free gift. He purchased it for his people, for his elect, at the high price of his own life blood. So what is there left for us to pay? Nothing. He had just proclaimed that all was now finished, John 19:30. There is nothing for us to contribute, nor can we contribute anything.

Now, of course, we do not have a license to sin once we come to know him. In fact, on the contrary, the same cross of Christ which is the ground of free salvation is also the

most powerful incentive to live a holy life now. And, beloved, to me there should be two responses to the cross of Christ, to the love and to the cost of the cross.

Number one, if you are here today without Jesus as Lord and Savior, conversion, salvation. If you don't know Christ as Lord and Savior I call you to bow the knee to him today, that you would see your sin and your need of salvation. Turn from your sin in repentance to follow Christ, to commit to Christ as Savior and Lord. Turn from it.

The cross is a great symbol of God's love. Don't stumble over it, but see it as your own means for salvation. Repent and receive Christ.

But last of all, believer, the cross of Christ should produce the response of commitment for believers. The great act of God's love should motivate us to holiness, a fiery love that doesn't ignore the great sacrifice of Calvary. Paul would say in 2 Corinthians 5:14, "For the love of Christ compels me. It moves me. It constrains me."

Paul would say in Galatians 6:14, "But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world."²⁹

What is your response to the cross this morning?

I am going to close with a hymn. I am going to read it to you. It is page 224 in our hymnal, *When I Survey the Wondrous Cross*. You can pick it up and look at it with me and think about it in response to the cross, number 224.

When I survey the wondrous cross,
On which the Prince of glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast
Save in the death of Christ my God:
All the vain things that charm me most, [his response to the cross]
I sacrifice them to His blood.

See, from His head, His hands, His feet,
Sorrow and love flow mingled down;
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?

Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were an offering far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.

²⁹ Galatians 6:14.

That is my response, right? Love so amazing, so divine, demands my life, my soul, my all.