

The King's Crucifixion

Matthew 27:32-44

Michael Felkins

Grand Avenue Baptist Church

Ames, Iowa

March 30, 2025

Where do you go to find kings in our day and age? It's difficult to find kings anywhere, because we live in a democratic age, and most kings have been replaced by presidents, prime ministers, or some other kind of elected official. Still, there are a few kings in our modern era. England, for example, has a king. Yet, in modern culture, most countries don't have a "king."

So, for most of us, it is strange to talk about having a king. Think about it, if you're a part of some organization, you don't have a king; you have a president. Where I live, we have an HOA, and it would be strange if we elected a king of our HOA instead of a president. My point is that talking about kings, queens, and monarchs is strange language in our modern culture. It is especially strange for Americans.

Yet, when we come to the Bible, we must learn about and embrace the language of "kings." After all, are two whole books of the Bible called "Kings." So, we must learn about kings and what it means to have a king.

Even with our lack of knowledge about kings, we know that kings are wealthy, they rule, they have thrones, and they wear a crown. So, the last place you would expect to find a King is on a cross. Yet, here in Matthew 27, we see the King of Kings, the ruler of the universe, occupying the lowest possible position that men in their depravity have devised – on a cross.

As we will see in Matthew 27:32-44, Jesus, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, is hanging on a cross of rough wood. He has been beaten beyond recognition. He is bleeding to death. He is being mocked and left to die a criminal's death. But when we examine Jesus' life and realize who He is and what He came to do for sinners, we realize that even as King, He is right where He should be.

It is common to be confused about why Jesus came and did what He did. We always need reminders because it is true when I say Jesus was where He should have been when He was nailed to the cross. Not because I said it, but because the Bible says it. One key verse that summarizes this truth is in 2 Corinthians 5:21. It reads:

For our sake he [God the Father] made him [Jesus the Son] to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him [Jesus] we might become the righteousness of God.

So, knowing Jesus was exactly where He was supposed to be, let's walk through vv. 32-44 and unpack the crucifixion of our King. Last Sunday, when we left off at v. 31, Jesus was being led away to be crucified.

Here's the main point: *The sacrifice of King Jesus on the cross is what paid for our sins.* This morning, we will behold the King and what His crucifixion accomplished. I have *three truths* to support the main point. So, let's get to work on our text.

I. Jesus endured the complete pain of the cross (vv. 32-34). As we look at v. 32, we are reminded of the full humanity of Jesus. We often focus on His divine nature and forget He was fully and truly human. Look in v. 32:

As they went out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name. They compelled this man to carry his cross.

Jesus' strength must have been spent. He had been kept awake all night. He was dragged to three court trials and convicted on false charges. He was slapped and spit on by the religious leaders. The soldiers beat Him with their fists and with rods. They drove a crown of thorns down on His head. Finally, they scourged Him with a cat-o'-nine tails almost to the point of death. He was bleeding profusely. Now they took the beam of the cross and laid it on His back. He was to carry the beam of the cross to Golgotha, the place where they executed criminals.

But here's the deal: They didn't take criminals on a direct route to be executed. What they did was to take the long way so that as many people as possible could see the criminal being crucified. Tradition tells us the name of this road was the *Via Dolorosa (the way of suffering)*.

While carrying the cross to Golgotha, people would scream insults at the person carrying the cross. At the same time, the soldiers would be whipping the criminal like an animal.

Friends, when Jesus got on this road, His strength was spent. There was no divine nature coming to His rescue. He had come to fully bear our sins to the cross and on the cross.

So, at some point, He must have stumbled and fallen to the ground. That's when the soldiers grabbed Simon, who was from Cyrene, and forced him to carry Jesus' cross. Verse 33 says:

And when they came to a place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull),

The criminal would either be lashed to the cross with ropes or nails. In Jesus' case, He was nailed to the cross beam. He had large spike-type nails driven through His wrists or hands, and then the beam was dropped onto the upright pole. After the beam was secured, then His feet were nailed to the cross.

Death on a cross was slow and excruciating. I mean, think of where we get the word *excruciate*. It is from the execution method of *crucifixion*. It means *out of the cross*.

So, let's consider what it is to be crucified. The criminal on the cross would usually die of asphyxiation. Here's what would happen: He would hang from his hands, and while in that position, he couldn't breathe. In order to breathe and relieve the pain from the nails in his hands, he would push up with his feet. By doing this, he could breathe and relieve the pain in his hands. He would push up until he couldn't stand the pain in his feet any longer. Then, out of fatigue and pain, he would return to the position where he couldn't breathe. Then the cycle would repeat itself. It could go on for hours until the man suffocated or bled out.

Sometimes, the executioners would give a drink mixed with wine and gall. It was some sort of concoction to numb the pain of the man being executed. This was not as much a mercy as it was a cruel joke to prolong the death of the person being executed. Yet, Jesus refused to drink the mixture. Verse 34 tells us:

They offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall, but when he tasted it, he would not drink it.

Jesus refused to dull the pain of the cross. He didn't intend to deaden the pain of His suffering for our sins. Jesus hung on the cross with His senses fully alert and with pain receptors fully functioning, knowing physically, emotionally, and spiritually the fullness of the wrath of God on Him for our sins.

The soldiers offering Jesus sour wine to drink fulfilled the prophecy of Jesus' crucifixion found in Psalm 69:20-21. It reads:

Reproaches have broken my heart, so that I am in despair. I looked for pity, but there was none, and for comforters, but I found none. ²¹ They gave me poison for food, and for my thirst they gave me sour wine to drink.

Not only was Jesus enduring the fullness of the pain of the cross, but He was also obeying God by fulfilling Scripture as He was dying. It is incredible how He kept His mind fixed on what He was doing out of His love for His people and His Father in Heaven.

I would have thrown in the towel long ago. I can't even begin to imagine what He went through. Last October, when I fell off the ladder and broke my hip, I wanted a painkiller as soon as I could get it. You're probably like me, and as soon as you get a headache, you reach for the Tylenol® or ibuprofen. I don't want to endure any pain. I avoid it if possible.

II. Jesus endured the offense of the cross (vv. 35-38)

When I say the offense of the cross, I mean the full shame and humiliation of Him being crucified. It is the offense of the cross as the Apostle Paul wrote in Galatians 3:13,

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree”

We are building on what we saw last Sunday as we witness Jesus receiving the curse for our sin. Friends, the intensity of the cup of wrath that Jesus drank in these verses increased.

So, let’s consider the offense of the cross being heaped upon Jesus. First, *they stripped Him of His clothes and gambled to see who would get them*. Look in vv. 35-36:

And when they had crucified him, they divided his garments among them by casting lots. ³⁶ Then they sat down and kept watch over him there.

As we learned last Sunday, for a Jew to be stripped naked is horribly shameful. By doing this, the executioners strip away the dignity of the one being executed. The physical pain is enough, but the emotional pain compounds the process of crucifixion.

Next, we will see that there was more mocking of Jesus when He was on the cross. Look in v. 37:

And over his head they put the charge against him, which read, “This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.”

This was the written charge and the reason why Jesus was condemned. The Romans would first hang the charge around the person’s neck while he carried his cross through the city streets. Then they would attach it to the cross so that everyone could see why he was being crucified. This exposed his crime and served as a warning to others.

The charge against Jesus was a simple statement: THIS IS JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS. Amazingly, Jesus was condemned because of who He was.

As we observed last Sunday, there is much irony in the charge against Jesus. Those who condemned Him thought they were mocking Jesus, but in reality, they proclaimed the truth about who He was. He was indeed the King of the Jews. He was the Messiah. He had come to save his people. The sign that was meant to be a cruel mockery was actually His true identity.

The last offense is in v. 38.

Then two robbers were crucified with him, one on the right and one on the left.

They may have aimed at humiliating Jesus, but everything they did fulfilled God’s word given 700 years earlier. Isaiah 53:12 says:

He poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors.

Again, we see those who aimed at mocking and humiliating Jesus actually fulfilling God’s purposes in His crucifixion. What they planned for evil was used for good.

III. Jesus endured the contempt of the cross (vv. 39-44).

Jesus bore the complete pain of the cross. He bore the complete offense of the cross, and now we see He endured the complete contempt of the cross.

In this last section, we see that Jesus was insulted and mocked by three groups of people: Those who passed by, the religious leaders, and the thieves.

The first group that held Jesus in contempt and insulted Him was those who passed by on the road while He hung on the cross. Look at vv. 39-40:

And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads ⁴⁰ and saying, “You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross.”

Remember, Jesus' death was a public execution, and so some people came out to watch Him die, and others were just going in and out of Jerusalem. However, He was being mocked for what He said about destroying the temple. Remember, this charge came up at Jesus' trial. They must have learned about it, so they used it to mock Him.

However, Jesus never said He was going to destroy the temple. He had been speaking of His body, and again, the irony is that on the cross, He was destroying the temple of His body in order to raise a new temple three days later when He was resurrected from the dead.

The insults they mocked Him with were also used by Satan in Matthew 4:4. When Satan tempted Jesus in the wilderness, He kept questioning Jesus' identity, saying:

If you are the Son of God, then turn these stones to bread, or if you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from the temple because the angels will catch you.

Yet, even in this mockery, Matthew is telling us something. He is telling us that those who mocked Jesus were fulfilling Scripture. Jesus was where He was supposed to be, receiving the insults He was supposed to receive. Psalm 22:7, says:

All who see me mock me; they make mouths at me; they wag their heads.

The mocking of Jesus on the cross was a direct fulfillment of Scripture. Think about how amazing this is. The Jewish people who walked in and out of the city and saw Jesus being crucified fulfilled what Isaiah and the Psalms told us about Jesus' crucifixion. Every word of God was fulfilled.

Next, in vv. 41-43, we see how the religious leaders derided and insulted Jesus:

So also the chief priests, with the scribes and elders, mocked him, saying, ⁴² "He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. ⁴³ He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him. For he said, 'I am the Son of God.' "

Now, once again, the religious leaders of Israel begin to mock Jesus. And, once again, Matthew records the extreme irony that comes from the mouths of these leaders. Without even knowing it, they quoted Psalm 22:8,

"He trusts in the LORD; let him deliver him; let him rescue him, for he delights in him!"

Now, these were some of the darkest insults Jesus endured. These men continued to attack Jesus' Sonship by implying that the Father doesn't love Him.

They didn't say these things directly to Jesus. No, they said these things to themselves within His hearing. They looked at one another and loudly stated that the Father didn't delight in Him.

This had to be a dark, painful moment for Jesus. He had already suffered many things. A disciple had betrayed Him. His best friends had deserted Him. Peter had denied Him. The soldiers had mocked, beaten, and scourged Him. The Jewish and Roman courts unjustly convicted him. He had been humiliated when they led Him to Golgotha. He faced more mockery from the public. Yet, now, as Jesus was on the cross dying for His people, the spiritual leaders of Israel, those who should have recognized Him and should have been teaching Israel the truth, suggested that the Father didn't delight in Him.

They had it completely wrong. They didn't know the Scriptures, and they didn't know they were fulfilling them. They didn't realize that by questioning who He is, they were actually proving who He is.

Matthew tells us that their questioning of God's delight in Him fulfilled Psalm 22:8 and proved that even though He was enduring incredible suffering, God was delighting in Him.

Finally, in v. 44, we see the two criminals insult Jesus. In that last scene, we see Jesus as the Savior of sinners:

And the robbers who were crucified with him also reviled him in the same way.

It's remarkable to see these men who are themselves being crucified join in ridiculing Jesus. You would think that such an experience might give you a little sympathy. But apparently, it didn't.

Matthew and Luke tell us that at the beginning of the day, both men insulted Jesus. They even used the exact words as the religious leaders. They questioned Jesus' identity and whether God delighted in Him.

However, Luke's Gospel tells us that by the end of the day, one of those thieves was saved. Sometime during that day, something changed in one man's heart. Perhaps it was seeing Jesus reviled and Him not responding in like manner. Perhaps it was the calm and majestic way Jesus suffered the pain of the cross. Perhaps it was the prayer that Jesus prayed for those who insulted Him: *Father, forgive them. They don't know what they're doing.* Perhaps it was something Jesus said to the thieves. Or perhaps it was witnessing all of these things together. We don't know exactly what happened, but we know one man was saved.

At some point, toward the end of the day, he turned to his fellow mocker and asked Him to stop because he realized Jesus was innocent. He became convinced that Jesus was who the mockers said He was. Then he asked Jesus to remember Him when He came into His kingdom. Jesus told him that today you will be with Me in Paradise.

Conclusion: Let me pull all of this together. I want to come back to something I have been telling you as we slowly work through Christ's crucifixion. Remember, Jesus told us in the Garden of Gethsemane that He was going to drink the cup of God's wrath.

Since Jesus was arrested, He has been slowly drinking that cup of wrath. Wrath is God's anger toward our sin. Jesus drank that cup of wrath that was reserved for us. In other words, He was paying for our sin so that by our faith in Him and repentance of our sin, we wouldn't have to.

Now, the Bible has a big word for this, and it is called – *propitiation*. It means that on the cross, Jesus satisfied the wrath of God that was against us for our sin. It means He turned it away from us by taking it Himself. This means the mocking, scorning, ridiculing, beating, scourging, and crucifixion of Jesus was God's wrath on Him for our sin. He took it for us. He was our substitute. He was our propitiation.

He was not only our substitute in His suffering and death, but He was also our substitute in His perfect, sinless life. In other words, Jesus lived the sinless life we should have lived. Even in all that Jesus endured as He went to the cross and even on the cross, He never sinned.

Then, on the cross, He died the death that we should have died. So, by our *faith and repentance in Jesus*, our sins are transferred to Him, and His perfect, sinless life is credited to us (as if we had lived it).

Think of your life as a movie, and God is watching the movie of your life. However, when He comes to the sinful part, He edits that out and splices Jesus' sinless life in your place. So, now when He looks at the movie of your life, He sees Jesus' perfect life as if you had lived it.

Ultimately, what this means is that we stand *justified* before God. God sees our lives as perfect and sinless because Jesus' life has been substituted for ours. Remember that I mentioned 2 Corinthians 5:21 at the beginning of the message? It says,

For our sake he [God the Father] made him [Jesus the Son] to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him [Jesus] we might become the righteousness of God.

This is what was going on in Jesus' death on the cross. 1 Peter 2:24 says:

He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.

The New Testament writers look back and see all of what was going on in Jesus' life and death, and they are amazed. They write to help us understand all of the implications of Jesus' life and death so that we may be saved from God's wrath and spend eternity in heaven.

Yet, I want to close with an illustration David Baum told us at our Gospel Life Group meeting Thursday evening. He told a story by pastor Allister Begg. Pastor Begg sets the scene by asking us to imagine what it was like for the thief on the cross who Jesus said would be with Him in Paradise.

Allister Begg uses the old James Kennedy question: *If you were to die tonight and stand before God, He would ask you, "Why should I allow you into Heaven?" What would you say?* Allister Begg says if you answer in the first person with something like, *"I did this" or "I did that," then you are basing it on your works.*

Then, Pastor Begg says, "Think of the thief on the cross who shows up in heaven. One minute, he was cussing Jesus, and then he asked Jesus to remember him when he came into His kingdom."

Then he dies, and suddenly, he is in heaven. He's greeted by one of the angels who asks him, "What are you doing here?" The man says, "I don't know." The angel then asked, "Well, how did you get here?" The man says, "I don't know."

Then the angel told him to wait while he got his supervisor. Then the supervising angel came to the man and asked the same questions, but the man told him the same thing; he didn't know.

Then the angel said, "Well, let's back up a bit. I need to ask you a couple of questions. What do you know about the doctrine of propitiation?" The man says, "Nothing." Then the angel asked, "Well, how about the doctrine of justification?" The man says, "I've never heard of it." Then the angel asked, "By what basis are you here then?" Then the man says, "The man on the middle cross said I could come."

Friends, it is so good to know solid, deep doctrine. It would be great if we all had a deep understanding of substitutionary atonement, propitiation, and the doctrine of justification. So, by all means, please come to Pastor Dean's seminar on *Justification* on April 12. Immerse yourself in that sweet doctrine, but you don't have to understand all of those doctrines to be saved. You only need faith in Jesus, the man who was on the middle cross. He is the One who died for you and rose from the dead.

Here are three takeaways: *First, Jesus' crucifixion was according to God's plan.* He was where He was supposed to be, doing exactly what He was supposed to do—dying to save sinners.

Second, Jesus never leaves us alone in our suffering. Because Jesus was where He was supposed to be when He suffered and died for us, now, when we go through suffering, we can absolutely know that Jesus is where He is supposed to be – He is with us. He has not left us. Jesus endured His suffering so that He would not abandon you in yours.

Third, even in your suffering, God delights in you. Remember how those who taunted Jesus questioned His identity. They questioned whether God loved and delighted in Jesus because He was suffering.

Sometimes, the experience of suffering will make us question whether God loves us. It will make us question our identity as a child of God.

In our hearts and minds, we hear the taunts when we suffer. We say things like, *"If I am a child of God, then why did this happen to me, or why am I suffering?"* Do you hear the echoes of the temptations that were said to Jesus? You see the taunts and contempt of the enemy still come to God's children.

However, because Jesus endured the offense and contempt of the cross – He won the victory. We can trust in the One who has overcome the temptation and suffering. He is exactly where He is supposed to be—with us, helping us, comforting us, and strengthening us to persevere.

Finally, Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection are what save us. Has Jesus saved you? Do you belong to Him? Don't leave here today without knowing whether or not Jesus has saved you.