

**"Lessons From the Scene of Christ's Crucifixion"**  
**Sermon on Matthew 27:37-44**  
**Saint Mark's, Watertown**  
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*He was pierced for our transgressions, Christ was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by Jesus' wounds we are healed. Amen.*

The Word of the Lord for us for this fifth Wednesday in Lent is Matthew chapter twenty-seven, verses thirty-seven through forty-four. It is the early part of Matthew's account of Jesus on the cross:

*Above his head they placed the written charge against him: THIS IS JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS. Two robbers were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left.*

*Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, "You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!"*

*In the same way the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders mocked him. "He saved others," they said, "but he can't save himself! He's the King of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, 'I am the Son of God.'"*

*In the same way the robbers who were crucified with him also heaped insults on him.*

This is God's Spirit-inspired Word of Jesus Christ.

**Introduction: Matthew's Account Records Christ's Silence on the Cross**

Dear fellow Christians—for whom Christ on the cross patiently restrained himself, and for whom the Scriptures were fulfilled when Christ was on the cross:

Just now I read to you Saint Matthew's account of the early hours of Jesus' crucifixion. And the unique aspect of this account – as opposed to the accounts of the other evangelists – is probably Jesus' silence.

You see, in Luke's account, Jesus has already said: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." In John's account, Jesus is already saying, early on, to his Mom: "Woman, here is your son," and to John: "Here is your mother." And again, in Luke's account, Jesus will soon say to the one crucified criminal with a change of heart: "Today you will be with me in paradise."

But in Matthew's account here, Jesus is simply silent. And for that matter, others are very loud. It's not at all that Matthew is denying Jesus' words in the other accounts. But it is true that Matthew is focusing our attention on other things—on the scene surrounding Christ on the cross.

**Theme: Lessons From the Scene of Christ's Crucifixion**

And so today, you and I will consider together: LESSONS FROM THE SCENE OF CHRIST'S CRUCIFIXION. And there are probably two of those lessons that glare at us from what I just read. First of all: CHRIST RESTRAINED HIMSELF FOR YOU while he was on the cross. And secondly: GOD PROPHESED IT ALL FOR YOU, while Christ was on the cross.

## Scripture: The Scene of Christ's Crucifixion

The particular section of Scripture before us covers the earliest hours of Jesus' crucifixion—from nine o'clock on that Friday morning, arguably the seventh of April of thirty AD, until at least mid-morning, or even all the way up to noon that day. We are at the foot of that well-known hill, just outside Jerusalem's gate to the northwest: the Place of the Skull, Golgotha, or Calvary. At the top of the little hill, maybe it's no more than fifty yards away, a detachment of four Roman soldiers has just raised a cross and put it in its post hole. Spiked to that cross, and drooping from it, is Jesus.

And then we read, and this is God's Word to us today: ***Above his head they placed the written charge against him.*** This was not uncommon. They placed that written charge so that passers-by could identify a particular crime—and be warned very solemnly not to commit it. So, what was Jesus' crime? Nothing, but the following: ***THIS IS JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS.*** Jesus' "crime" was being the king, the shepherd-king, the loving, rescuing shepherd of God's people. And as such, he had to undergo this type of death.

Furthermore: ***Two robbers*** – pretty certainly they had committed murder during their crime sprees – ***were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left.*** They were positioned as if Jesus were the worst of the three, in the middle.

And then, much more than in any of the other accounts, we hear the abuse Jesus heard—abuse, in fact, from no less than three groups of people.

The first group of abusers? ***Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads.*** These would have been some of the thousands heading to and from the temple on this festival Passover day. ***They said, "You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!"***

They had seen – or at least heard of – Jesus overturning the tables of the money-changers and driving out both merchants and animals: not once, but twice—some three years ago, and then again this past Monday. They had heard – or at least heard of – Jesus claiming he would rebuild the temple (really: his body) in three days. They had heard that others claimed that Jesus claimed that he was God the Son.

Obviously, they thought, none of that was true. And so, they taunted him: "Come down from the cross!"

The second group of abusers was more defined, more organized, more systematic. They had had time to prepare for this day, and they relished it. ***In the same way the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders, and the Pharisees*** are in there, too—they ***mocked him.***

These were the sum total of all Jesus' enemies. ***The chief priests*** – Annas, Caiaphas, and the others – were the ringleaders, whose supreme leadership position Jesus had threatened; they had now succeeded in getting him murdered. ***The teachers of the law*** (the professional Bible handlers and instructors), ***the elders*** (in the seventy-member Jewish ruling council, the Sanhedrin), and ***the Pharisees*** (those pious laymen, whose scrupulous good deeds were their hope to get to heaven)—these all hated him, because he claimed to bring a whole New Testament, a whole new official agreement between God and people, one open even to (gasp!) the Gentiles.

And so, they belittled Jesus. And notice: they belittle him in the third person. They don't talk to him, as the others had done. Instead, they talk about him, and loudly enough that he can hear them—but not so as to precipitate an honest conversation with him. It's all so very sinister....

First: "*He saved others," they said, "but he can't save himself!* That's an attack against his work.... Next: *He's the King of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him.* That's an attack against his identity.... (And by the way, don't be fooled by them: nothing he did – not even coming down from the cross – would have convinced them that he was God the Son, the Savior.) And finally: *He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, 'I am the Son of God.'*" And that was an attack against his own relationship to his Heavenly Father....

Now, do all those words sound familiar? Sure! The words Jesus' enemies spoke at the foot of the cross are exactly the words David prophesied they would speak—as we heard in our Old Testament reading. Isn't that amazing?!

And finally—and this is the end of God's Word to us today, we get to the third group of abusers. The passers-by ridiculed him, the Jewish leaders systematically belittled him, and now: *In the same way the robbers who were crucified with him also heaped insults on him.* Even these evil men, even these thieves, even these murderers insulted him. Yeah, one would later repent, but for now both of them joined in. Can you imagine the insult?!

And that's it. That's God's Word to us today. So, what does it mean?

### **Application One: Christ Restrained Himself ... for You!**

Well, first of all, think of the patient restraint, the amazing self-control, the other-worldly restraint that Jesus exercises here—on our behalf!

I mean: Have you ever been in a position like that of Jesus? Oh, sure you have! Not that you ever suffered to this extent – no! – but you've been in this position.... Somebody is mocking you. There's no basis to it. They keep it up. At first, you ignore it well enough. But they go on and on and on. Then, what do you do? You retaliate, right?! You talk behind their back. Or you get sarcastic at them. Or you holler at them. Or you even haul off and punch them, don't you?! Yeah, and I do, too. And it's a real mess of stinking sin on our part.

But Jesus didn't retaliate. And do you know why he didn't? He loved you! He loves you, and he says to you, "I'm suffering this crucifixion, I'm tolerating all these assaults, I'm undergoing this hell ... in your place. These are the consequences of your sins. But I'm undergoing them for you, so that you will never have to do so. Trust me! I'm dying for you!

That's the first message from the scene of Christ's crucifixion. Christ restrained himself for you! And it means eternal life for you!

### **Application Two: God Prophesied It All ... for You!**

And secondly—the second glaring message from the scene of Christ's crucifixion: God prophesied all this—for you!

I mean, think of how certain all of this can make you that Jesus really is your promised Savior. Suppose, for a moment, that Jesus were a charlatan, a fraud. Maybe he could consciously have arranged his life so that he would appear to fulfill some of the Old Testament prophecies. Maybe he could have arranged on his own to ride into Jerusalem on a donkey on Palm Sunday. Maybe he could have arranged on his own to celebrate Passover and Lord's Supper with his disciples on Maundy Thursday.

But no way – no way! – could he ever have bribed his enemies to repeat the words of Psalm twenty-two against him the way they did here. In fact, this is an amazing fulfillment of Messianic prophecy! You'd think that all these leaders would have realized that they themselves were now completing prophecies in regard to the Christ. They didn't.

But we do know it! And so, we can say with perfect certainty—it's another of those cases where the Holy Spirit taps us on the shoulder and says, "See, this stuff is really true! Christ Jesus really – certainly! – died for you!" And it means eternal life!

### **Conclusion: Matthew's Account Encourages Us to Speak Out for Christ**

Those are the Lessons from the Scene of Christ's Crucifixion. Christ restrained himself—for you! God prophesied it all—for you! And eternal life is yours!

So now, when Christ faces ridicule – and he still does, doesn't he?! –now when Christ faces ridicule, you will stand up for him. You will speak up for him. And what's the best thing for you to say? You'll say, "I'm praying, my friend, that the day will come when you realize that Jesus is worth your honor, rather than your ridicule—and he is worth your confidence. Jesus faced worse ridicule than you will ever heap upon him. And he did it for you. He took your transgressions away. And he wants you to believe it, and to have eternal life in his name, just as I have been drawn to do. Amen.

*We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Jesus Christ the iniquity of us all. Amen.*