

Mocked and Forsaken

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Date: 30 November 2025

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[0 : 00] It's a real privilege for me to be able to read these verses. Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor's headquarters and they gathered the whole battalion before him.

and they stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him and twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on his head and put a reed in his hand. And kneeling before him, they mocked him saying, Hail, King of the Jews!

And they spit on him and took the reed and struck him on the head. And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes on him and led him away to crucify him. As they went out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name. They compelled this man to carry his cross. And when they came to a place called Golgotha, which means place of a skull, they offered him wine to drink mixed with ghoul.

But when he tasted it, he could not drink it. And when they had crucified him, they divided his garments among them by casting lots.

[1 : 16] Then they sat down and kept watch over him there. And over his head, they put a charge against him, which read, This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.

There were two robbers. Then two robbers were crucified with him, one on the right and one on the left. And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads 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. So also the chief priests with the scribes and elders mocked him, saying, 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. He trusts in God. Let God deliver him now, if he desires him.

For he said, I am the Son of God. And the robbers who were crucified with him also reviled him in the same way. Now from the sixth hour, there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour.

[2 : 26] And about the ninth hour, Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, Lema sabachthani? That is, My God, My God, Why have you forsaken me?

And some of the bystanders hearing it said, This man is calling Elijah. And one of them at once ran and took a sponge, filled it with sour wine, and put it on a reed, and gave it to him to drink.

But the other said, Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him. And Jesus cried out again, with a loud voice, and yielded up his spirit.

And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom, and the earth shook, and rocks were split.

The tombs also were open, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, and coming out of the tomb after his resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many.

[3 : 28] When the centurion and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake, saw the earthquake, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe and said, Truly, this is the Son of God.

Will you pray with me as we come to God's word? Father, I ask for your spirit's power to work through your word.

in showing us who you are in the face of your Son, seen most clearly here at the cross. I can't break through even in my own heart, so I ask that you do it for each one of us.

In Jesus' name, Amen. Well, a Navy SEAL, a US Navy SEAL named Matt Bissanetti, he was part of the raid to capture and kill Osama Bin Laden, and he wrote a book about it, and he said that after Bin Laden was shot and killed, they were taking his body in the helicopter, and one of the Navy SEALs sat on Bin Laden's chest as the seat for the duration of the flight.

He also says in the book, apparently, that they found in Bin Laden's room some just-for-men hair dye. Now, I could use some of that.

[5 : 10] It's not great. I get that's an interesting story, the capture and end of such an enemy, but why the mockery?

He's already defeated. He's gone. Why the mockery? It's really... I don't have a real answer here. A psychologist in the room might have a better answer, but we all know mockery, don't we? We all know it. It's making sport of a person, using someone for your amusement, for other people's amusement.

It's humiliating their very person to their very core, even if they're dead. Now, I'm guessing you've experienced it.

We've all experienced it to one degree or another. Now, going through this passage, one effect that it had on me is it convicted me of something I'm now very ashamed of, and I'll get a phone call from my parents later asking what that is, but I'm not going to share that because it's not the place to do it.

[6 : 28] James 3, 8-9 addresses Christians saying, no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil full of deadly poison.

With it, we bless our Lord and Father, and with it, we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. We've not all just been the recipients of ridicule.

We've all been the perpetrators. I'm assuming that. Mockery of Bin Laden as unworthy of any basic dignity, it's distasteful, but how much worse is it for an innocent teenager?

The target of the jeering crowd, their person, their worth. Now, please, if that's happening to you, reach out to your parents and reach out to teachers.

You were very much loved by God and us, but so much worse. How much worse is it still who we have here?

[7 : 43] How much worse is it the one who gives all men their life and breath, the one who has every right to speak into my life and say, here's how you should think, here's what you should do?

He has the right. He has all right. The one who came to us, not with an iron fist or something, he lowered himself by becoming one of us.

He came to serve, he was gentle and lowly. how many people did he restore body and soul through his miracles and teaching? I don't understand why all these people in what happened that day mock.

I don't fully get. I don't fully get why I mock. I ridicule human beings. I don't fully understand it, but I think what Matthew wants us to see is what all humanity will do to God if given half a chance.

If God doesn't fight back, here's what humanity will do to him. If you still hold on to a notion that most human beings are basically good if they've got the right upbringing, here's how a survivor of the Soviet Union gulag, the atrocities that happened there.

[9 : 13] He had every right to say those perpetrators are evil and we're the good ones. And here's what he said, the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being.

And we see that here in our passage. Jesus is already condemned by Pilate, he's a dead man walking, but the soldiers, verse 29, ridiculed him.

verse 31, Matthew emphasises it, after they mocked him, they take him out to be crucified. Now, while hanging on the cross, verse 39, the crowds come past and they derided him, they joined in on ridiculing him.

And then you've got the chief priests, verse 41, the scribes and elders, they mock him. And then you've even got verse 44, the criminals who are hanging either side, they get in on it.

Everyone, given half a chance, here's what we will do to God, for insisting that he is God, even if he comes lowly and serving.

[10 : 25] There's a great differences between Jew and Gentile, they were hostile, but here they are united in their mockery of God. Now, there's two aspects that Matthew wants us to focus on.

The first section focuses on his identity, Jesus as king. And then the second part focuses on his salvation, you who saved others, you can't even save yourself.

King and saviour. So let's, I just want to feel the weight of it, let's go through the story, and we'll see what we learn.

So pilots, these are pilots, soldiers, verse 27, the whole company, so 600 or so soldiers, whoever were present probably, this was over the top, let's get the whole company who are present here to

just surround this guy.

They humiliate him and strip him naked, he's impotent, he can't defend himself, they imitate Caesar's crown, if you see on the coins, the Caesar's wreath on his head, and so they put a crown of thorns together and shove it on his head and then they get a staff to symbolise a ruler's scepter and they use it to whack him.

[12:10] Avah, Caesar, hail, king of the Jews. You can imagine one of the extroverts in the room coming out and being the first to do it. I'm saying that as an introvert to try and kind of, I wouldn't have done it of course, spit on him.

I remember my dad getting really got me in trouble, I'll put it that way, when I spat at my brother. It is such an offensive thing to do, to spit at someone.

It's so unnecessary, he's already condemned. They're just making sport of him. So after this, the four soldiers were the execution squad and make him carry, usually it would just be the cross beam, not the whole cross as usually the pictures say, but take him to a public place.

And now crucifixion, 2,000 years of Christian tradition is kind of someone put it as domesticated it. Let me read Tom Holland's description now, that's not Spider-Man, I'm sorry, but something way cooler, he's a historian, way cooler, he's not a believer, here's how he describes it, no death was more excruciating, more contemptible than crucifixion.

To be hung naked, long in agony, swelling with ugly wheels on shoulders and chests, helpless to beat away the clamorous birds, such a fate Roman intellectuals agreed was the worst imaginable.

[14:03] This in turn was what rendered it so suitable a punishment for slaves. The corpses of the crucified, once they had first provided pickings for hungry birds, tended to be flung into a common grave.

So foul was the reek of their disgrace that many felt tainted even by viewing a crucifixion. Despite the ubiquity of crucifixion across the Roman world, few cared to think much about it.

The surprise is less that we should have so few detailed descriptions in ancient literature of what a crucifixion might actually involve, than we should have any at all. Even the Roman intellectuals were going, well, we didn't invent that, the Assyrians invented that.

It ended by suffocation usually, or shock, or heart failure. have to lift themselves up on the wounds to breathe, and then collapse again.

Now, surprisingly for Matthew, the pain, the pain isn't focused on at all. But I'm hoping, hearing from Tom Holland, we hear the shame of it, the disgrace of it.

[15:35] It's the world rejecting you as lower than human. Roman law, apparently, citizens, Roman citizens were not allowed to be crucified, unless Caesar gave a direct edict.

So here we see his world mocking him, putting him to shame, because he's weak, he's a weak king. It's not surprising that the enemies, Gentiles, would treat the Son of God that way, but then verse 39 to 44, for his very own people, his own family, if I can put it that way.

But for the Jews, viewing the cross, it's not just shame, it's shame from God as well, you're under a curse. Deuteronomy 21, 23, you're cursed by God.

So the leaders, their aim in getting him crucified is to inflict as much public revulsion as possible onto him.

[16:55] He's cursed, cursed even by God. Verse 34, the mockery continues. They offer him a drink mixed with gall.

Now, possibly it's a narcotic to ease the pain, man, but if that's the case, then Jesus is choosing to be in his right mind through this, but more likely, it was part of making fun of him.

Here, let's put something so bitter in his drink, he thinks it's going to give him a little bit of comfort that he has to spit it out because it's so bitter.

And probably naked, they cast lots, they gamble for his sandals and belts and inner and outer garment.

And the people passing by, they hurl insults as well. And here's where we turn to the salvation theme.

[18:04] You who are trying to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself. You can't even save yourself. And the Sanhedrin, he saved others.

that's probably referring to his healing ministry, he saved others. He doesn't even have supernatural power to save himself. What kind of saviour are you? You can't even save yourself.

Why are they saying this? He's already condemned. I don't know, it seems to me, let's see what you think, it seems to me, they're trying to strip him of any human dignity or worth reputable even as he's dying.

The mockery continues with this whole Elijah bit. Some Jewish tradition held that Elijah would come rescue the righteous. Now, offering him a drink, that's hard to say to a drink, that's hard to say whether they're is that compassion or it could be part of their hey, here, have a drink so that you survive longer and suffer longer.

It could be part of their mockery. it probably is them sitting there going, all right, let's wait to see if Elijah comes, he's not coming.

[19 : 44] Let's prolong his life because God's not going to rescue him. There's no reference to Psalm 22.

Matthew doesn't say this is to fulfill but it is fulfilling Psalm 22 written by King David with precision. The religious leaders, they did not know that they were fulfilling verse 8 of Psalm 22.

He trusts in the Lord, let him deliver him, let him rescue him for he delights in him. The dogs encompass me, a company of evildoers encircles me.

They have pierced my hands and feet. For my clothing they cast lots. This is the one man in all history whose biography was written before he existed.

weak, king, cursed, king.

[21 : 05] Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53 say, yes, that's right. That's exactly right. my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

That verse is the key to understanding this passage. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? what does the cross mean?

Now, some who claim the title Christian use the cross as he's our example. Look at his love laying down his life for others.

It is that, but some people claim that's what's the primary meaning, that's it, he's an example to follow. I've heard an illustration how strange that idea is.

If you were walking beside a riverbank with someone and you said, I want to show my love for you and the river is in flood. I'm going to show my love and you just dive in and get swept away and die.

[22 : 27] That's not showing love. That's why on earth would you do that? But if that person was in the river and you jumped in to save them and you were swept away and die, okay, that's love.

There must be some salvation happening here for it to even be an example of love. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

It is way more than just example. He's doing something for us. I've only been married 12 years, I hope that's right.

I'm beginning to appreciate older saints. When they've been married and they lose their spouse of 30, 40, 50 years and just the expressions of just a massive part of themselves are gone.

One person is like the world is lost its colour. It's just black and white now. I'm starting to appreciate that.

[23 : 50] When you've known that love for so long, now that's just 50 years, what agony would it be to lose the love you've experienced for eternity?

you've known it for eternity. Here's his relationship in Matthew 11.

No one knows the son except the father and no one knows the father except the son. But it's worse than just loss and tragedy, it's abandonment.

It's rejection. It made me think of someone falsely arrested by the police and their father was against them.

It's abandonment. He really is being forsaken, abandoned. We are witnessing hell.

[25 : 08] that I deserve to receive from God. The darkness is just the darkness in the sky at that time was just this hint at the deep rejection taking place.

The horror of the world's sin laid on him. reading the Bible story with Sam last night and he said it wasn't the nails keeping Jesus there.

I was like, oh, that's an insightful comment. What, what, why did he stay there then? to die for our sins?

We see the love of God in Christ, the whole world debasing him. His father, he's known his love for all eternity, abandoning him and he stayed.

He stayed. that's his love. There's going to be times in each of our lives where we feel like we are utterly forsaken by God.

[26 : 36] He's not answering our prayers. You feel nothing of his presence. His word just doesn't feed you as it once did.

there was a Christian poet, we sing some of his songs, William Cowper, who had several rounds of suicidal depression and this lady wrote a poem for him about this passage.

Yea, once Emmanuel's orphaned cry, his universe universe hath shaken. It went up single, echo-less, my God, I am forsaken.

It went up from the Holy's lips amid his lost creation, that of the lost no son should use those words of desolation.

In other words, Jesus cry, my God, I am forsaken, you should not use those words, because you're not, you never will be. However you feel, you never will be, now or for all eternity.

[28 : 00] I should never say I'm forsaken,! He summarizes what the cross is all about, what the whole Bible is all about in two lines, ready?

The essence of sin is man substituting himself in God's place, the essence of salvation is God substituting himself in my place.

That's what we're seeing here. then in verse 51 to 54 we see the victory. He is raining on the tree. Nothing has shaken up life as we know it, the world order as we know it, or nothing in your life, whatever experiences you've gone through, nothing has affected your life, if you're a believer, as profoundly as this moment, this moment when he yielded up his life, his spirit to God.

Yes, the resurrection confirms and puts into effect Christ's victory, but Matthew wants us to see that the victory was won here, right in this moment, when he yielded up his spirit at the cross.

[29 : 38] I think we're meant to be seeing him reigning, he is king, in this moment where his body is hanging limp on a cross.

My death is probably going to be the end of what I accomplish, but see what he accomplishes with his death. Verse 51 to 54, there's three world heavenly shaking victories.

The curtain temple was torn in two. The tombs of Old Testament saints are broken open and they're raised and this Roman centurion confesses faith. If we can go through each of these, the temple, if you tried to go near God's presence in the temple, you'd be met with get out signs at every stage. If you're a Gentile, you couldn't go further than the outer court. If you're not a priest, you couldn't go further than the inner court. if you weren't the high priest, you couldn't go further than the holy place. You couldn't go into the most holy place. He could only go in once a year. He had to clean vigorously and confess and blood. Jesus taking our curse, the curtain is torn top to bottom.

[30 : 57] open access to walk and talk with God as your heavenly father every day, all day, all night.

Open access. I learned from Cole that little storage room, this used to be a Catholic church, that was the confessional.

I don't know if I knew that but I've forgotten it. Priest comes in the back, you come in that way, confess your sins, get forgiveness from the priest, here's what you do for penance.

No. No. You have open access. There's no place, there's no person except for Christ. He's your high priest, Hebrews says.

You who would destroy this temple and rebuild it in three days. He is the new and living way. If you just look at his dying breath in this moment hanging lifeless on the tree, if you trust that is enough, he's opened the way to the Father.

[32 : 12] Not only no entry, come in, please. You don't come in often enough. Come. The way to the Father is open, trusting this very moment.

to see him raining on the tree. Then we have the resurrected saints. Only Matthew records this.

This is unreal. Verse 52, 53.

Matthew seems to jump ahead himself. We're not up to the resurrection, Matthew. Hang on. It's like God can't wait to show us. Look at the victory. He's just won. The earthquake is the thing that breaks open the tombs, but the resurrection is tied to his resurrection.

Matthew ties it to his, Jesus' resurrection. So these Old Testament saints, whoever they were, they were Old Testament saints, share in the victory over the curse of sin.

As much as you and I today will share in that victory. And Matthew, I think, places it here so that we see that the victory was won at the cross.

[33 : 32] Speaking to a Muslim in Sydney after indoor soccer, I've lost touch with the guy now, but he objected to my Christian arrogance to say that I know for sure that after judgment we agree there's going to be a judgment, that I'm going to live.

Allah is merciful, but a devout Muslim cannot presume to know the final judgment. There's no assurance of life. A pastor in the UK once received a letter in his mailbox from a Roman Catholic family who had a sudden tragedy.

someone died and they asked him to pray for their child to survive the thousands of years in purgatory. Now, it's heart wrenching.

They're in deep pain, but they had no assurance. They were devout. They had no assurance. Then you got the non-religious poem of Dylan Thomas about his dying father.

Do not go gentle into that good night. Old age should burn and rave at close of day. Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

[34 : 58] No assurance. Do you see the power over your death, over your tomb in this moment? Because he yielded up his spirit in your place.

We can say like Paul, to live is Christ, to die is gain. If I'm to live in the body, that means fruitful labour for me, yet which I shall choose, I don't know.

There's assurance. see him reigning, nailed to the tree. Now, I know theologically he's raised, he's ascended, but I'm saying Matthew wants us to see the victory was won at the cross.

Then the third barrier, unbelief. Verse 54, the universal rejection and mockery of God becomes a universal church confessing faith and awe in this sun, in this moment.

Matthew is the most Jewish of the four gospels. But you know where it's going to end in terms of the Great Commission, go to all nations and here we get the first fruits of that.

[36 : 19] This Roman centurion seeing the darkness, feeling the earthquake, no doubt seeing something in this Jesus as he died, filled with awe.

Truly this was the Son of God. And the message of Christ crucified is invading every culture one heart at a time.

When we were at Bible College, we shared a unit with a Nepalese couple, a Pakistani couple, and the most different to us of all, New Zealand couple.

I love any New Zealanders. It was just a cheap joke, I'm sorry. I joined the mockery, don't I? Now that's just a taste of the universal church.

church. It's one thing for one culture to find something beautiful, but for all the differences among us in the world, and we're all looking at this moment of this limp body going, wow, it gives glory, it gives glory to God.

[37 : 39] We see the universal church. church. So do you see the power of God and the love of God to save you in this mocked and weak and lifeless king?

does it move your heart to awe and humbled and thankful for what he's done for you? It made me think of 1 Corinthians 1, for the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power, it is the power.

I want to finish two things. What is the fundamental, if you can see the power of God in Christ crucified and his victories, what's the fundamental reason why you see his salvation?

Why did the Roman centurion, I think it's a pretty safe presumption that he was part of that crowd who were kneeling before this guy, spitting in his face, just a few hours later, this is the son of God. Why did he see? Why did the criminal hanging next to him, Matthew says he joined in with the reviling? Luke tells us something changed.

[39 : 31] He ended up saying, remember me when you come into your kingdom. Imagine saying that to this dying man on the cross who the world is condemning. You've got a kingdom, let me in please.

Why did he see it? Why did Nicodemus, a Pharisee, he saw it in the end, John's gospel tells us. Acts 6 verse 7 says that a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith. Why did they see? Why do you see him as king when others hear the same message and don't?

a lady came to R.C. Sproul, a Bible teacher, and he asked, he pressed her on why, why you and not others, gently I think, but are you wiser than others to comprehend the Bible?

No, no, no, it's not, I'm paraphrasing it, no, it's not my wisdom. Then did God see some kind of raw material in you that you're more useful to him than others?

[40 : 54] No, no, it's not anything like that. Were you more humble? Are you more humble in receiving this news? No, I don't want to say I'm more humble than others.

I just received his grace. But why did you receive it and not others? I saw him and what he did in the gospel story, but why did you see when others don't see?

He was just pressing the point. In the end, when you ask why do you believe, if you're a believer, why do you believe and others don't see the glory here?

Either you've got to say I'm not much, but I'm a teensy wincy bit better than other people. Either you've got to say that, I see no way around that, or you say, I'd still be rejecting him and mocking him if he hadn't revealed his glory to me.

In my utter weakness, he opened my eyes. saying, it was him choosing me. I think they're your two options. I'm saying this to urge us, let your boast only be in him.

[42 : 21] If you see his glory, his power at the cross, let your boast be in him. Going back to Matthew 11, Jesus said, at that time, Jesus declared, I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children.

Yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls, for my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

Let's give all the credit to him, if you see his power and glory. And just quickly and finally, if we see God's power working through his weakness and rejection and feeling utterly overwhelmed, let's expect God to powerfully work through us in our weakness and rejection and utterly overwhelmed. strong. I keep wanting to be strong as the world counts strong. If we want this message of the cross to be shown in our lives and spoken, get ready for weakness, but let's embrace it God's power, this message of the cross will shine forth through our weakness.

[44 : 39] This is an abrupt ending, but that's all I've got. Let's pray. Let's pray. pray. Our Father in heaven, that we can call you our Father, we give all praise to you, we thank you.

May the depths of our heart thank you. Thank you. May we trust you deeply, whatever sense of being forsaken we go through and you lead us through.

May we see at the cross the victories that we will never be forsaken and I pray that you would help us embrace using us to spread this message through our weakness.

By your spirit's power I pray. Amen. Amen.