

This Is the King of the Jews

The Malicious Mockery of the Most Majestic King

Scripture: Matthew 27:27-44

Sermon Series: Mathew

Topic: Jesus, Crucifixion, Mockery

Introduction

Matthew is walking us through one of the saddest, but most significant days in human history. He is allowing us to see the events that are unfolding, which the prophets foretold and which Jesus foretold. God is at work behind the evil events of wicked men, working salvation through His only Son, Jesus of Nazareth.



Judas, on the night of Passover, **delivered** Jesus to the chief priests and elders in the Garden of Gethsemane. During the night they condemned Jesus to death. When morning came, the chief priests and elders **delivered** Jesus over to Pilate (Mt 27:1-2) charging him with claiming to be the King of the Jews (Mt 27:11). Pilate questioned Jesus and found nothing in him worthy of imprisonment or death (Mt 27:18-19, 23) and therefore he sought to release him, but the crowds demanded his death (Mt 27:22-23, 25). Pilate failed to protect Jesus and capitulated to the sinful demands of sinful people and he then **delivered** Jesus to be crucified (Mt 27:26).

Jesus Scourged

Just before being delivered to be crucified, Jesus was first **scourged**. Roman **scourging** was a “judicial penalty” involving a beating with a multi-lashed whip that contained embedded pieces of bone and metal.¹ This was also referred to as **flogging** and was horrifically painful and sometimes was fatal. Jesus had known beforehand and announced in advanced that this was coming to him.

Matthew 20:18-19 (ESV) ¹⁸ “See, we are going up to Jerusalem. And the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to

¹ ESV Study Bible note 1 at Matthew 27:26.

death ¹⁹ and deliver him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified, and he will be raised on the third day.”

Jesus knew in advance that he was to be flogged. And he silently embraced this tortuous abuse so that he could fulfill the will of the Father.

Now Matthew walks us through the malicious mockery of this most majestic man. During the next series of events, Jesus says nothing. There are two scenes of this mockery, the first inside in private and the second outside in public. The first takes place inside the praetorium at the hands of the soldiers (vs.27-31). The second takes place outside at Golgotha, or Calvary, where Jesus is crucified (vs.32-38). As he hung exposed on the cross, he endures mockery at the hands of the Jews, including passersby, religious leaders, and the criminals with whom he was crucified.

Scene 1: Private Mockery in Praetorium (vs. 27-31)

Matthew takes us inside the praetorium as Jesus is mocked by hundreds of soldiers.

Matthew 27:27-31 (ESV) ²⁷ Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor’s headquarters, and they gathered the whole battalion before him. ²⁸ And they stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, ²⁹ and twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on his head and put a reed in his right hand. And kneeling before him, they mocked him, saying, “Hail, King of the Jews!” ³⁰ And they spit on him and took the reed and struck him on the head. ³¹ 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.

The soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor’s headquarters (v.27). Jesus has just been *scourged* (v.26) and now the soldiers take him inside Pilate’s praetorium to disgrace him even further. “The praetorium is the official residence of the provincial governor.”² Jesus is now outside the view of the people. He is completely without any friendly support. He is alone with “*the whole battalion*.” The word ‘battalion’ here is *speiran*, which means ‘cohort.’ At full capacity a cohort is 600 men, but the word is also used to refer to a maniple, which numbers 200 soldiers.³ Matthew wants us feel the weight of this. Jesus is alone, away from public view, standing condemned in front of hundreds of unfriendly soldiers. There is presently no check on the evil they may do to him. These soldiers make brutal mockery of Jesus.

² W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, vol. 3, International Critical Commentary (London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 601.

³ Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 711 note 56.

They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him (v.28). They begin the mockery by stripping him naked. The mockery continues as they put a robe on him as a mock royal robe. They use whatever is close at hand. In this case, they get a red robe of a Roman officer.

Twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on his head (v.29). In place of a king's royal crown, they make a mock crown out of strand of twisted thorns and press this into his head.

And a reed in his right hand (v.29). The reed is a mock scepter.

And kneeling before him, they mocked him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews" (v.29). Imagine the scene. Jesus' back is lacerated, battered, and bleeding. His body is in shock. He has this rough, red robe thrown over his open wounds, then a thorny crown is violently pressed into his head, a mock scepter is pushed into his hand, and then hundreds of soldiers bow on their knees before him and together mockingly shout in fake worship, "Hail, King of the Jews!" *Jesus simply stands silently before them.* No doubt the room echoed with mocking laughter as they stood from their kneeling position.

And they spit on him and took the reed and struck him on the head (v.30). While being tried at the high priest's palace, the chief priests and elders had spit in his face and struck him when they condemned him to death (Mt 26:67). Now something similar happens in Pilate's palace. Hundreds of soldiers, in mock worship, and then rise to hit him and spit upon him.

How did Jesus stand silently before them and allow them *to strike him in the head* when he could have destroyed them in a moment? He stood silently before the brutal mockery of 600 soldiers, even though with one word he could have called down 6,000 angels.

Would you stand silently and endure a unjust smack in the face? I got into one fight in high school over an unjust smack in the face. Duels have been fought over unjust smack in the face and Jesus stood silently and endured multiple unjust smacks and hit the face!

Imagine the scene. Imagine his face after this abuse.

How did Jesus stand silently before them and allow them *to spit in his face* when he could have given one command and destroyed the whole battalion? Spitting is a sign of utmost contempt. It may be the most disgraceful act one can do to another short of physical assault against a person.⁴ After hundreds of soldiers spit in his face, Jesus would have been soaking wet.

Jesus stood silent before them.

⁴ In the OT a man who refused to marry his deceased brother's widow and so raise up children to carry on the brother's name was commanded to be spat upon in his face by the widow (Dt 25:9) because he has done a despicable thing.

These soldiers mock and abuse Jesus thinking, “**This** is the king of the Jews??”

Scene 2: The Public Mockery at Golgotha (vs.32-38)

Now Matthew leads us out of the praetorium, down the streets of Jerusalem, out of the city gate, and to a hill called Golgotha, where Jesus is crucified and mocked even more.

Matthew 27:32-34 (ESV) ³² As they went out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name. They compelled this man to carry his cross. ³³ And when they came to a place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull), ³⁴ they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall, but when he tasted it, he would not drink it.

As they went out (v.32). This means they went out of the city. They passed through the city gates and went outside the city walls.

They compelled a man to carry his cross (v.32). Roman custom dictated that every condemned criminal had to carry one’s own crossbeam to the area of crucifixion. Jesus did not have to strength to carry his own cross due to the blood loss from the scourging. Thus a man was grabbed from the crowd and “*compelled*,” i.e. “forced”⁵ to carry it for him. This man’s name is **Simon of Cyrene**. Matthew knows him by name and knows where he is from. Cyrene is located in modern day Libya, located in Northern Africa. It was a Greek colony and Roman city. Simon is a Jewish name and so this man may have been in Jerusalem to celebrate Passover. Mark tells us that he was “father of Alexander and Rufus” (Mk 15:21). Since he and his family were well known among the first Christians, we assume this man became a believer. This man was evidently passing by as Jesus was falling down under the weight of his cross and so he was forced by the soldiers to carry it for him.

Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull) (v.33). Crucifixions always took place in very public places because they were used as a deterrent to criminal behavior.⁶ This place would then have been located outside the wall of the city, on a hill, not far from a busy road.⁷ Our English word, “Calvary,” comes from the Latin word *calva*, which means ‘a skull.’ Thus, the hill then was known by this word because it looked like a skull.

They offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall, but when he tasted it, he would not drink it (v.34). Mark says this wine was mixed with myrrh (Mk 15:23). Some have said this was used as a mild narcotic to dull the pain of crucifixion. This is exceedingly unlikely for the Romans did

⁵ Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, vol. 33B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1995), 834.

⁶ R. T. France, *Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 1, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 400.

⁷ D. A. Carson, “Matthew,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 575.

nothing to reduce pain, but rather did everything to intensify pain. Myrrh tastes bitter, like gall, thus, Mark was describing the content of the wine, while Matthew was describing its taste. Matthew is pointing out another form of cruel mockery by these soldiers who offer wine, which would be welcome under such dire circumstances, but they have poisoned it to such an extent that it is undrinkable. "In both Hebrew and Greek, the words for "gall" in Psalm 69:21 (*rōšš* and *cholē* respectively) refer to various bitter or poisonous substances."⁸ This offer of spoiled wine is not an offer of kindness, but rather another expression of mockery.

And when they had crucified him (v.35). Matthew does not dwell on the horrid details of crucifixion. We can only assume that he understood his readers would know it well enough without having to speak of the tortuous specifics. However, we should not fail to grasp how utterly horrible crucifixion was. It was so terrible that it was against Roman law for any Roman citizen to be crucified, unless an exception was personally granted by Caesar.

Jesus is silent.

They divided his garments among them by casting lots (v.35). The possessions and clothing of a condemned criminal became the property of his executioners. In this case, there were four soldiers (Jn 19:23) and they divided Jesus' clothes among them. However, Jesus had a tunic that was of high quality garment and they cast lots to see who would get it (Jn 19:23-24). They had no idea that their selfish had been foreseen as in indicator of what would happen to Messiah.

Then they sat down and kept watch over him there (v.36). Those who were watching over Jesus were four soldiers and a centurion (Jn 19:23; Mt 27:54). Matthew alone reports this, but it is implied in other gospels. The purpose is to ensure that the full sentence was carried out and to see to it that no one brought aid or rescue to the condemned. The soldiers remained to ensure that the sentence of death was fully carried out. They would ensure death, for if they did not, then the punishment that the condemned was to receive would be carried out on them.⁹

And over his head they put the charge against him... This is Jesus, the King of the Jews (v.37). Romans often used various methods of crucifixion, sometimes in the form of an X, a T, or †. Since the charge was put "**over his head**," we know the latter was used with Jesus. "The statement of the crime was often written on a white tablet in red or black letters and displayed on the cross."¹⁰ John tells us that Pilate wrote this inscription in Aramaic, Latin, and Greek (Jn

⁸ D. A. Carson, "Matthew," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 575.

⁹ For example, when Peter was later condemned to death and was locked in prison with four soldiers guarding him, he was miraculously released by an angel during the night. After discovering his escape, Herod questioned the sentries who were guarding him and then put them all to death because that was the sentence Peter was to endure (Acts 12:6, 19).

¹⁰ D. A. Carson, "Matthew," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 576.

19:20). He may have done this to spite the Jewish leaders because this was the charge that they brought against Jesus.

Through all of this, Jesus is silent.

As we behold this scene, we cannot help but wonder, how can the king of the Jews be crucified? **THIS** is the king of Jews?

Two robbers were crucified with him, one on the right and one on the left (v.38). Matthew creates a literary picture for us so we can see the scene. Jesus is one of three men crucified that day. The men with him are **two robbers**. Jesus is situated in the middle of these two criminals. Jesus is surrounded by two thieves who may even be insurrectionists, like Barnabas.¹¹ He who has never sinned, is surrounded by sinners. He who has never robbed anyone is surrounded by robbers. He who has never transgressed is surrounded by transgressors.

Mockery by Jews (vs.39-44)

Now Matthew describes the scene while Jesus is there hanging on the cross. This humble, self-sacrificing man is now more viciously mocked by three groups of Jews; those passing by, the religious leaders, and lastly those criminals with whom Jesus was crucified.

Group 1: the Passersby (vs.39-40)

As crucifixions always took place in highly visible places, those passing by are first Matthew notes.

Matthew 27:39-40 (ESV) ³⁹ 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."

And those who passed by decried him (v.39). The word "**decried**" here is *eblasphēmeoun* and means, "to blaspheme, revile, or slander." It is synonym for mocking. "**Those who passed by**" were those on the roadway near the crucifixion site. These were Jewish pilgrims who had come to Jerusalem for the celebration of Passover. They launch a direct attack upon Jesus by speaking directly to him as they pass by him ("You who would destroy ... save yourself! You... come down...").

Wagging their heads saying... (v.39-40). These people knew something about Jesus. They were aware of things he had taught. They had either heard or been told of what he said about the temple. On the first instance of Jesus cleaning out the temple of the money changers,

¹¹ Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew*, vol. 1, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 1034.

which took place at the beginning of his ministry (Jn 2:13-22), Jesus said, "**Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up**" (Jn 2:19). They had mistakenly thought that Jesus was speaking about the physical temple building, but actually Jesus was speaking about his own body (Jn 2:22). In "wagging their heads" in cruel mockery,

If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross (v.40). We've heard this language before in Matthew's gospel. We first heard these words, "**if you are the Son of God,**" from the mouth of Satan while he was tempting Jesus for 40 days in the wilderness (Mt 4:2-3,6). At the end of that 40 day period, we are told that the devil "departed from him until an opportune time" (Lk 4:13). Here is an opportune time. Satan is back.

He attacks Jesus in his weakest most vulnerable moment. Satan is present maliciously mocking the Son of God as he is suffering for sinners. Just as Satan was earlier present in the words of Peter trying to get him to avoid the cross (Mt 16:23), so now he is present in the words of these passersby tempting him to **come down from the cross!**

These passersby do not believe he is **the Son of God**, so they do not think they are blaspheming him, but it "is indeed blasphemy when mortals in this way dictate to the Son of God how he should exercise his divine sonship."¹² With the physical attack on Jesus has now fully deployed by having him nailed to a cross, now Satan intensifies the psychological attack through mockery of a verbal attack. Jesus could indeed come down of the cross if he chose to do so, but then how would the will and word of the Father be accomplished?

They mock and wag their heads thinking, "**THIS** is the king of the Jews??"

Group 2: the Chief Priests, Scribes, and Elders (vs.41-43)

Like rapid gun fire the mockery and verbal abuse continues through the chief priests, scribes, and elders of the people.

Matthew 27:41-43 (ESV) ⁴¹ 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.'"

He saved others, but he cannot save himself (v.42). This is so very similar to what Jesus warned would be said of him, "*Physician, heal yourself*" (Lu 4:23). It is not that he cannot save himself, but rather that *will not* save himself. As we have already seen, he could call the angelic hosts¹³ of heaven to come in an instant to his rescue, but that would not save us! If Jesus saves himself, then we are lost, but if he loses himself, then we who trust in him can be saved!

¹² Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 717.

¹³ Matthew 26:53.

He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross (v.42). They mocking refer to him as “*King of Israel*.” They speak better than they know. They doubt this fact, but their mockery proclaims the truth. This Satanic mockery has also infected the religious leaders of Israel. Now in their mouths is the voice of Satan inviting him to come down from the cross for a second time. Satan is attacking with intensity. He knows that what is happening on this cross is significant. Satan is not only tempting through the passersby, but now he is tempting through those who ought to celebrate and welcome this gracious and holy man. Satan for his wicked purposes uses the very people who look to be the most righteous. These he uses to hurl his verbal abuse and malicious mockery upon a weak and wounded and dying Jesus—who truly is the King of Israel, who because he is filled with love, is choosing to die like a criminal!

We will believe in him (v.42). They say they would believe in him, but of course they would not. Nothing would cause them to believe in Jesus, even if he were to come down off the cross. If he did, as they had done in the past, would certainly attribute such a feat to the power of Satan. They have demonstrated that they will never believe in him, despite the mountain of evidence Jesus had already laid before him.

He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him. For he said, “I am the Son of God” (v.43). These leaders remember Jesus’ claim to be “the Son of God.” Therefore, they now mock him based upon that claim. They assume God has cursed Jesus because the OT law declares that “cursed is one who is hanged upon a tree” (Dt 21:23). It never occurred to them that God would cause the curse to fall upon his innocent Son, whom he loved and who willingly chose to bear the curse for the cursed children of God.

These religious leaders mock Jesus thinking, “**THIS** is the king of the Jews?”

Group 3: the Robbers (v.44)

The last group of Jews to mock Jesus are the other two crucified robbers themselves.

Matthew 27:44 (ESV) And the robbers who were crucified with him also reviled him in the same way.

These two condemned men join in the mockery and they too reviled him.¹⁴ This now completes a circle of those who are mocking Jesus. He is being mocked by everyone around him. No one in this scene is believing in Jesus. He is now rejected by Jewish leaders, Gentile leaders, the only worship he receives is that of the cruel mockery of brutal Roman soldiers. He has been rejected by the crowds who once followed him and now even the criminals with whom he was crucified have rejected him. How utterly alone is he?

¹⁴ Luke tells us that one of those robbers by the end of the day became convinced that Jesus is the Messiah, but at this point he is not yet convinced.

How tempting it would be to turn this tortuous tale with a single sentence?

These criminals mock Jesus thinking, “**THIS** is the king of the Jews??”

Matthew wants us to imagine the emotional and spiritual trauma this would have caused Jesus. He is completely abandoned by all who might give him encouragement. Jesus is completely alone. He is completely rejected by all. He is completely abandoned by all human support. He is completely silent.

He is enduring temptation that he has never before endured. He is the divine Word through whom all of his persecutors were created and he is submitting himself to their wicked will. And yet, he is fulfilling the will of his Father. He is atoning for the sins of all who will look to him for forgiveness, salvation, and righteousness.

Conclusion

What do we see of this Jesus?

The scourging of Jesus took place to fulfill what was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah.

Isaiah 50:6 (ESV) I gave my back to those who strike...

The striking on the face and the spitting upon Jesus took place to fulfill what written by the prophet Isaiah.

Isaiah 50:6 (ESV) I gave my... my cheeks to those who pull out the beard;
I hid not my face from disgrace and spitting.

The offering of the poisoned wine to Jesus happened in fulfillment of what was written by the prophet David.

Psalms 69:21 (ESV) They gave me poison for food,
and for my thirst they gave me sour wine to drink.

The casting of lots for the clothes of Jesus happened in fulfillment of what was written by the prophet David.

Psalms 22:18 (ESV) ...they divide my garments among them,
and for my clothing they cast lots.

That Jesus was crucified along with two convicted criminals fulfills what was written by the prophet Isaiah.

Isaiah 53:12 (ESV)

... 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.

As the passersby mocked Jesus, they fulfilled what was written by the prophet, David.

Psalms 22:7 (ESV) All who see me mock me;

they make mouths at me; they wag their heads;

As the religious leaders mock Jesus, they fulfill what was written by the prophet David.

Psalms 22:8 (ESV) "He trusts in the LORD; let him deliver him;

let him rescue him, for he delights in him!"

Through all of this Jesus was silent in fulfillment of what was written by the prophet Isaiah.

Isaiah 53:7 (ESV)

He was oppressed, and he was afflicted,
yet he opened not his mouth;
like a lamb that is led to the slaughter,
and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent,
so he opened not his mouth.

Jesus was silent, but the Scriptures shout, This **IS** the King of the Jews!