

# Truly This Is the Son of God

Subtitle

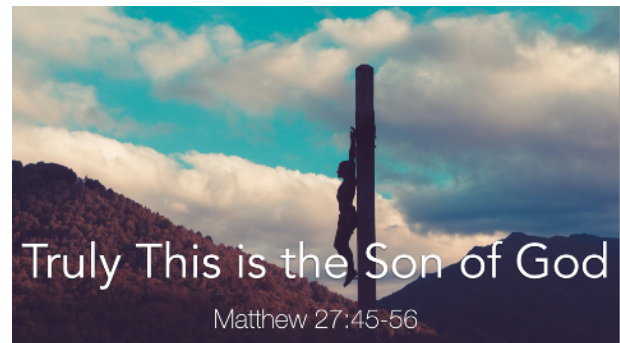
**Scripture:** Matthew 27:45-56

**Sermon Series:** *Matthew*

**Topic:** Jesus, Crucifixion, Son of God, Messiah

## I. Introduction

These next three paragraphs of Matthew's gospel, record the events that surround the death of Jesus (Mt 27:45-56). In the previous section (Mt 27:32-44), he had related to us how Jesus had been mocked and abused by the soldiers, led out of Jerusalem to Golgatha where he was there crucified, As he hung on the cross, he was then mocked by the passersby, the Jewish religious leaders, and even the two criminals crucified with him. In that section, Matthew records one small detail that no other gospel author specifically notes, which is found in v.36.



**Matthew 27:36** (ESV) Then they sat down and kept watch over him there.

He was referring to the soldiers who crucified him and were responsible to see to it that he died. This squad of soldiers was made up of four soldiers<sup>1</sup> and one centurion.<sup>2</sup> As these five men are watching over Jesus, they witness things that amaze them. They change their minds about Jesus. They move from mockery to amazement. What they say is the heart of this portion of God's word.

**Matthew 27:54** (ESV) When the centurion and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe and said, "Truly this was the Son of God!"

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<sup>1</sup> John 19:23.

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 27:54; Luke 23:47.

What has happened? How did these soldiers move from attacking him to standing in awe of him? How did they go from persecuting him to praising him? All of the events that unfolded while Jesus was crucified, lead them to be filled with awe and to confess him as to truly be the Son of God! This is amazing! As they watched over Jesus they saw things happen that convinced them that he is the Son of God. As they kept their eyes on Jesus, they came to conclude that Jesus was related to God in a way that was not true of any other human being.

This reminds us of our theme for this ministry year, which is, "**You will see the Son in power and glory**" (Mt 26:65; 24:30). What we see unfolding in the lives of these five soldiers is our prayer for this ministry year. That we would keep Jesus before us, that we keep our eyes on him, and as we do, that we would see him demonstrated among us in power and glory.



## II. Truly This Was the Son of God

What did these five soldiers see that day? What did they hear? What "took place" before them that led them to the conclusion that, "Truly this is the Son of God?"

**What does "the Son of God" mean?** What meaning is contained in the title?

1) It means that Jesus is **equal** with God.

**John 5:18** (ESV) This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.

**John 10:30** (ESV) "I and the Father are one."

2) It means that Jesus is **uniquely loved** and related to God.

"This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased"  
**Matthew 3:17; 17:5**

God has never said such a thing about any other human being. Not a single one. No one. No other prophet, preacher, priest, or holy person has God spoken about in this way. None. Jesus is uniquely related to God the Father. Jesus is not merely a man, or merely a prophet. He alone is the Son of God.

John 17:5 (ESV) "And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed."

- 3) It means that he is the Christ, the **divinely anointed messiah** who alone fulfills all of God's promises to Israel.

Matthew 16:16-17 (ESV) <sup>16</sup> Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." <sup>17</sup> And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven."

2 Corinthians 1:20 (ESV) For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory.

- 4) It means that Jesus alone is the **means of atonement and forgiveness** of sin whereby we can enjoy peaceful communion with God the Father.

Luke 1:35 (ESV) "...the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God."

Matthew 2:21 (ESV) "...you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."

John 14:6 (ESV) Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

1 Timothy 2:5 (ESV) For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,

Matthew lays before his readers four witnesses who each testify that truly Jesus is the Son of God. First, is the witness of creation. Second, is the witness of Jesus himself. Third, is the witness of God. Fourth, is the witness of man; these five soldiers and the many watching women.

## 1) The Witness of Creation (vs.45, 51)

Matthew calls the first witness to the stand. Creation itself bears witness that Jesus is the Son of God catastrophic convulsions.

Matthew 27:45 (ESV) Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour.

Matthew 27:51b (ESV) And the earth shook, and the rocks were split.

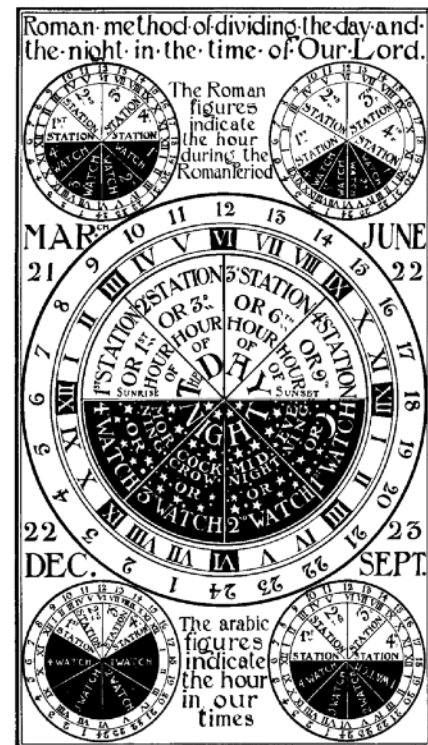
**Darkness.** The day began at 6:00 a.m., which was the first hour of the day, as indicated by this chart.<sup>3</sup> Mark tells us that Jesus was crucified at “the third hour,”<sup>4</sup> which would be equivalent to our 9:00 a.m. Thus, Jesus would have been on the cross for three hours—enduring the mockery that we previously discussed—when the darkness then began at high noon and continued until 3:00 p.m.

Thus, when the sun was daily at its brightest, on *this* day, it gave no light at all. This darkness was not the result of a solar eclipse. First of all, Passover “occurred during a full moon, and a solar eclipse can only occur during a new moon.”<sup>5</sup> Second, no naturally occurring escape ever lasted for three hours. This was a supernatural event. Creation is saying something!

Darkness is often seen as creation’s agreement with the judgment of God upon the sin of mankind. Darkness was the ninth plague of judgment God poured out upon Egypt. Death was the tenth and final plague, but immediately before death came darkness. The language describing that plague is virtually identical to what is written here by Matthew (Ex 10:15). Almost certainly what is happening in this moment is a fulfillment of what was spoken of beforehand by the prophet Amos.

<sup>9</sup> “And on that day,” declares the Lord GOD,  
 “I will make the sun go down at noon  
 and darken the earth in broad daylight.  
<sup>10</sup> I will turn your feasts into mourning  
 and all your songs into lamentation;  
 I will bring sackcloth on every waist  
 and baldness on every head;  
 I will make it like the mourning for an only son  
 and the end of it like a bitter day.  
**Amos 8:9-10 (ESV)**

Creation is here testifying that the feast of Passover has now been turned into a day of mourning. The sun has hidden it’s face and so darkness is spread over all the land. Creation is bearing witness to the fact that Jesus is the Son of God and as his life is ending, the brightness of this day is turned into a bitter day of mourning.



<sup>3</sup> Dom Gasper Lefebvre, *Saint Andrew Daily Missal* (St. Paul, MN: E.M. Lohmann Co., 1953), 183.

<sup>4</sup> Mark 15:25.

<sup>5</sup> *ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001) note at Matthew 27:45.

**Earthquakes and rocks.** The earth agrees with the sun and trembles, while the rocks are split. At the moment of the death of Jesus, there is an earthquake. When the earth shakes beneath your feet, you will certainly pay close attention. Earthquakes are also found at times when God's judgment is being poured out.<sup>6</sup> Jesus had said, on the day the day of his triumphal entry, that if the people were silent, then the stones would cry out (Lk 19:40). On this day, perhaps the stones did cry out (at some unheard frequency) with such force that rocks were split.

On this day, the sun went dark, the earth shook, and the rocks split. Creation is responding to Jesus on the cross and testifying, "Truly, this is the Son of God."

## 2) The Witness of Jesus (vs.46-50)

Matthew calls his second witness, which is Jesus himself. Jesus does two things that bear witness that "Truly he is the Son of God." He does so in *what he says* and *how he dies*. First, what he says points to his atonement for sin. Second, what he does bears witness to the fact that he truly is divine, in that he willed himself to die.

**Matthew 27:46-50 (ESV)** <sup>46</sup> 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?" <sup>47</sup> And some of the bystanders, hearing it, said, "This man is calling Elijah." <sup>48</sup> 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. <sup>49</sup> But the others said, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him." <sup>50</sup> And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit.

*And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice* (v.46). It is now three hours later. It's 3:00 p.m. Jesus is still very much alive and he cries out loudly in the darkness. The Greek here is φωνῇ μεγάλῃ, which literally is, "*megalē phōnē*," or to transliterate, "mega phone." He shouted loudly!<sup>7</sup>

*"Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?"* (v.46). The first two words, "Eli, Eli," are in Hebrew, while the last two words are in Aramaic.<sup>8</sup> Matthew provides the necessary translation, "**My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?**" Jesus is quoting the opening sentence of Psalm 22. Some have referred to Jesus' words here as "some of the most profoundly mysterious words in the entire Bible."<sup>9</sup> It is difficult to know all that is going on, but clearly Jesus is feeling separated from God the Father. The very next sentence of Psalm 22 is, *Why are you so far from me?* Sin is what separates us from God. Thus, *in this darkness, God has put upon his only beloved Son,*

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<sup>6</sup> Isaiah 29:6; Ezekiel 38:19; Matthew 24:7; Revelation 6:12; 8:5; 11:13, 19; 16:18.

<sup>7</sup> Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 397.

<sup>8</sup> R. T. France, *Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 1, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 404.

<sup>9</sup> *ESV Study Bible* explanatory note at Matthew 27:46.

*the sin of all people who would ever trust in him.* Now is being fulfilled what was written by the prophet Isaiah.

**Isaiah 53:6 (ESV)**

... the LORD has laid on him  
the iniquity of us all.

**Isaiah 53:8 (ESV)**

By oppression and judgment he was taken away;  
...he was cut off out of the land of the living,  
stricken for the transgression of my people?

**Isaiah 53:10 (ESV)**

Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him;  
he has put him to grief;  
when his soul makes an offering for guilt...

**Isaiah 53:11(ESV)** Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied;  
...the righteous one, my servant,  
make many to be accounted righteous,  
and he shall bear their iniquities.

**Isaiah 53:12 (ESV)** ... he poured out his soul to death  
and was numbered with the transgressors;  
yet he bore the sin of many...

As Jesus is bearing our sins, he is also experiencing the resulting separation from God. He, for the first time, is now cut off from the intimacy and joy with God that sinlessness brings and which he has always known. He now cries out in "anguish of soul" because he who is holy is now bearing the wretchedness of our sin. He became cursed on our behalf.

**Galatians 3:13 (ESV)** 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."

Jesus bore our sins and turned God's wrath away from us who believe in Jesus.

**1 John 2:2 (ESV)** He is the propitiation for our sins...

Propitiation is a word that means Jesus took upon himself God's just wrath and hatred of sin, which by doing so now changes God's disposition and attitude towards us. God no longer looks at us WHO ARE IN CHRIST not as sinners, but saints; not as strangers, but as sons and daughter, not as foreigners, but rather as family. Because Jesus took upon himself our sin, and

atoned for them, God the Father no longer looks at us WHO ARE IN CHRIST BY FAITH as unrighteousness, but as righteous!

**2 Corinthians 5:21** (ESV) For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

We don't become righteous by our own work, but by faith in the work of Jesus! This is to what Jesus is testifying while he is crucified. Jesus himself is bearing witness to the fact that he is taking upon himself the sin of the saints who go to God through him. Jesus is bearing witness with loud shouts that he is being separated from the Father so we can become his sons and daughters!

*Jesus... yielded up his spirit* (v.50). That Jesus '*yielded*' his spirit means that he chose the moment of his death. He willed himself to die. The word literally means, "to send away the spirit."<sup>10</sup> Luke confirms that this is exactly what he did. Matthew does not tell us what Jesus shouted loudly before "*yielding up his spirit*," but Luke does.

**Luke 23:46** (ESV) Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!" And having said this he breathed his last.

John tells us that Jesus also said, "*It is finished*" (19:30). Thus, after completing all the will of the Father, Jesus willingly chose to send his spirit into the hands of the Father. He chose the moment of his death. That he did this is confirmed by Pilate's surprised reaction to the news of Jesus' death (Mk 15:44). Pilate was surprised. When Pilate heard that Jesus was already dead after only six hours, he did not believe it and asked for a centurion to confirm this, which he did (Mk 15:45). Sometimes those crucified could linger for days on the cross, but Jesus died relatively quickly because he chose to "yield up" his spirit. Jesus had shared beforehand that he would do this.

**John 10:17-18** (ESV) <sup>17</sup> "For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. <sup>18</sup> No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father."

Jesus remains in sovereign control of his life even to the very last minute before his death. No one took his life from him. He laid it down of his own will.

Jesus is bearing witness that truly, he is the Son of God. His words from the cross bear witness to this fact as do his actions on the cross. Both his words and his deeds while on the cross bear witness to the fact that Truly he is the Son of God.

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<sup>10</sup> Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 265.

### 3) The Witness of God (vs.51-53)

Matthew now calls the third witness to the stand. God himself, at the very moment of Jesus' death, bears witness that Jesus is his Son by tearing apart the curtain in the temple and the tombs in the cemetery.

**Matthew 27:51 (ESV)** And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom.

**A torn curtain.** This curtain, which is also called the veil (which is more that more closely mirrors the fabric of the OT tabernacle and Solomon's temple<sup>11</sup>), is the curtain which separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place. This was the curtain that separated the presence of God from the other inner section of the temple. The curtain kept the priests out, except for the one day of the year, the Day of Atonement, or Yom Kippur.

In this temple, Herod's refurbished temple, which took 46 years to build, this curtain was 60 ft. tall and 30 ft. wide.<sup>12</sup> No one human could physically tear in two this massive curtain. No one human could possibly stand above this 60 ft. curtain and tear it "from top to bottom." This was clearly the activity of God himself. God is unmistakably at work. At the very moment of Jesus' death, God is tearing away all that separated himself from his people. Sin has been atoned for and the barrier now removed.<sup>13</sup>

**Hebrews 10:19-20 (ESV)** <sup>19</sup> Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, <sup>20</sup> by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh,

Jesus is now the way into God's presence. Jesus is now the meeting place to commune with God the Father. The temple is now no longer where to find God's presence. Jesus and Jesus alone is the doorway to God. Jesus' death, his shed blood, and his torn flesh, are now the means for meeting with God the Father. God did nothing like this at the death of any other person in human history. God is bearing witness that only Jesus' blood atones for sin. Only through Jesus can any man enter into communion with Him.

**Torn tombs.** God also bears witness that only through Jesus can anyone have eternal life.

**Matthew 27:52 (ESV)** The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised,

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<sup>11</sup> Exodus 26:31, 33, 35; 27:21; 30:6; 2 Chronicles 3:14.

<sup>12</sup> *ESV Study Bible* note at Matthew 27:51.

<sup>13</sup> See also Hebrews 6:19; 9:7-12, 24.

At the moment, Jesus died, God shook the earth, he split the temple curtain, he split rocks, and he split open tombs. God shook open the graves the "saints who had fallen asleep" in Jerusalem. And when Jesus was resurrected on the third day, so were many OT saints.

**Matthew 27:53** (ESV) ...and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many.

When Jesus was resurrected, so too were "many bodies of the saints." When Jesus returned to life, these too came with him and "appeared to many." The apostle Paul tells us that Jesus is the "first fruits of the resurrection" (1 Cor 15:20). There are one hundred questions that are raised by this passage, but since this is all we know about this event, we can only say that God is here demonstrating that only through the death and resurrection of Jesus can the dead live. Only through Jesus can eternal life be granted.

God is bearing witness that Truly Jesus is the Son of God. He tore the curtain of the temple to demonstrate that Jesus is the atonement that brings. God tore open the tombs to demonstrate that through death and resurrection of Jesus, eternal life has come! God did both of these mighty deeds to bearing witness that truly Jesus is the Son of God.

#### 4) The Witness of Man (vs.54-56)

The final witnesses called come from the realm of man. Both men and women bear witness that Jesus is the Son of God.

**Matthew 27:54** (ESV) When the centurion and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe and said, "Truly this was the Son of God!"

The centurion and his men have been watching all that unfolded with Jesus and they are "**filled with awe!**" They swung the hammer and nailed his hands and feet to the cross and Jesus did not curse them, but rather they heard Jesus say, "*Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do*" (Lk 23:34). They have seen people mocking Jesus for hours, and yet they did not hear Jesus speak one mocking word back to them.

These men have crucified many men and watched them die, but they never seen any man die like Jesus. They'd seen many dying men scratch and claw and scream, but Jesus was calmly silent before them. They'd heard many men curse and swear, but from Jesus they heard the loving words he spoke to his friend saying, "From now on, please take care of my mother" (Jn 19:26-27).

They have crucified many men, but they have never the sun go dark for three hours at the brightest part of the day. They have seen men die, but they have never heard a man speak out

of the darkness and say, "*It is finished*," and hear him breath his last breath and only then immediately feel the ground shake under their feet and hear rocks cracking all around them.

These five soldiers have seen a lot, but they've never seen a day like today. They stood there in shocked awe! These men were stunned at everything they had seen. And all they can say is, "Truly this was the Son of God." These five men bear witness to the truth that Truly this man was the Son of God.

Finally, we have the unspoken witness of many women.

**Matthew 27:55-56** (ESV) <sup>55</sup> There were also many women there, looking on from a distance, who had followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to him, <sup>56</sup> among whom were Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Joseph and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.

These many women—some named and others unnamed—have been with Jesus from the beginning of his ministry. And they are still with him. They may be "looking on from a distance," they have not left him. They many women have seen something in this man Jesus that is unlike anything they've ever seen in any other man. They supported him financially and ministered to him and his disciples in many ways. These many women have not abandoned this man called Jesus. In this portion of the story, they say nothing, but do not their actions bear witness to that fact of who Jesus truly is. Does not their constant dedication speak to the truth that his man is worth following. Can you not hear in their deeds saying loudly, Truly this is the Son of God?

### III. Conclusion

The events that unfolded on this day are unlike those of any other day in human history. The Son of God was crucified and the Son of God died. Truly Jesus died and truly he is the Son of God. Matthew gives us four witness to the truth of this.

- 1) **Creation** bears witness to this fact by the sun going dark during the three brightest hours of a normal day, by the earth shaking, and by rocks splitting.
- 2) **Jesus** bears witness to this fact by shouting out in anguish that he had been separated from God because he was bearing the sin of all who would trust in him and by choosing to die. No one took his life from him. He willingly laid it down, just as he said he would.
- 3) **God** himself bear witness that Jesus is his Son by tearing the temple curtain in two and by tearing open tombs and then three days later resurrecting to life some of the OT saints and allowing them to be seen by many in Jerusalem.

- 4) The **soldiers** standing watch over Jesus saw all of these things and they stood in awe of Jesus and publicly declared, "Truly this is the Son of God."

Do you believe the testimony of these witnesses?

Do you believe that truly, Jesus is the Son of God?

## IV. Discussion Questions

1. What is the theme for this ministry year? On what two verses is the theme based?
2. What was presented in the sermon as the main idea of this portion of Scripture (Mt 27:45-56)?
3. Do you agree or disagree? Why or why not?
4. What does it mean that Jesus is the Son of God? What four facts were offered in answering this question?
5. What four witnesses were presented as evidence pointing to the truth that Jesus is the Son of God? What did each of those witnesses present as supporting evidence?
6. What events fulfilled Scripture? Where were they seen in the Old Testament?
7. Why do you think Jesus cried out, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" What do you think he was feeling?
8. Why was there darkness over the land for three hours?
9. What was the cause of Jesus' death? Who killed Jesus?
10. What happened when Jesus died? What do these events tell you about Jesus?
11. Why is the significance of the curtain being torn "from top to bottom?" What are the theological implications of this?
12. What does the fact that after Jesus' resurrection some OT saints were resurrected and went into Jerusalem and "appeared to many" tell you? Do you believe this happened? Why or why not?
13. Why did the centurion and his soldiers say, "Truly this was the Son of God?" What is the significance of this statement? Do you think the centurion and his soldiers became believers in Jesus that day? Why or why not?