

## Matthew 27:11 - 54

Background #1: Crucifixion was the Roman death penalty for political traitors and revolutionaries. It was intended to publicly humiliate the victim and put fear into the public. The Jews feared and hated the cross as a symbol. To them, it meant that Caesar still held power over them, and that God still had not brought Israel out of Exile. To them, Jesus looks God-forsaken and cursed.

Background #2: Motifs of sin that Jesus takes on

- **Adam** was considered a 'firstborn son of God' (Gen.2:7; Lk.3:38) but fell into sin.
  - As a result of the fall, Adam and Eve realized they were *naked* (Gen.3:7) and *thorns* emerged from the ground (Gen.3:17 – 19).
- **Israel** was chosen by God to be a 'firstborn son of God' (Ex.4:22 – 23; Rom.9:4) but also fell into sin.
  - Israel's sin was *scarlet* in color because of their bloodshed (Isa.1:18).
  - A Jew sinful enough to be *hung on a tree* was cursed by God and outside the covenant (Dt.21:23).
- **The Davidic kings** were chosen by God to be a 'firstborn son of God' (Ps.2:7 – 8), but also fell into sin, starting from David himself.
  - David asked, '*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*' (Ps.22:1).

<sup>27:11</sup> Now Jesus stood before the governor, and the governor questioned him, saying, 'Are you the King of the Jews?' And Jesus said to him, 'It is as you say.'<sup>12</sup> And while he was being accused by the chief priests and elders, he did not answer.<sup>13</sup> Then Pilate said to him, 'Do you not hear how many things they testify against you?'<sup>14</sup> And he did not answer him with regard to even a single charge, so the governor was quite amazed.<sup>15</sup> Now at the feast the governor was accustomed to release for the people any one prisoner whom they wanted.<sup>16</sup> At that time they were holding a notorious prisoner, called Barabbas.<sup>17</sup> So when the people gathered together, Pilate said to them, 'Whom do you want me to release for you? Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?'<sup>18</sup> For he knew that because of envy they had handed him over.<sup>19</sup> While he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent him a message, saying, 'Have nothing to do with that righteous Man; for last night I suffered greatly in a dream because of him.'<sup>20</sup> But the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowds to ask for Barabbas and to put Jesus to death.<sup>21</sup> But the governor said to them, 'Which of the two do you want me to release for you?' And they said, 'Barabbas.'<sup>22</sup> Pilate said to them, 'Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?' They all said, 'Crucify him!'<sup>23</sup> And he said, 'Why, what evil has he done?' But they kept shouting all the more, saying, 'Crucify him!'<sup>24</sup> When Pilate saw that he was accomplishing nothing, but rather that a riot was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd, saying, 'I am innocent of this Man's blood; see to that yourselves.'<sup>25</sup> And all the people said, 'His blood shall be on us and on our children!'<sup>26</sup> Then he released Barabbas for them; but after having Jesus scourged, he handed him over to be crucified.

<sup>27</sup> Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole Roman cohort around him.<sup>28</sup> They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him.<sup>29</sup> And after twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on his head, and a reed in his right hand; and they knelt down before him and mocked him, saying, 'Hail, King of the Jews!'<sup>30</sup> They spat on him, and took the reed and began to beat him on the head.<sup>31</sup> After they had mocked him, they took the scarlet robe off him and put his own garments back on him, and led him away to crucify him.<sup>32</sup> As they were coming out, they found a man of Cyrene named Simon, whom they pressed into service to bear his cross.<sup>33</sup> And when they came to a place called Golgotha, which means Place of a Skull,<sup>34</sup> they gave him wine to drink

mixed with gall; and after tasting it, he was unwilling to drink.<sup>35</sup> And when they had crucified him, they divided up his garments among themselves by casting lots.<sup>36</sup> And sitting down, they began to keep watch over him there.<sup>37</sup> And above his head they put up the charge against him which read, 'This is Jesus the King of the Jews.'

<sup>38</sup> At that time two *lestai* [Jewish revolutionaries like Barabbas] were crucified with him, one on the right and one on the left.<sup>39</sup> And those passing by were hurling abuse at him, wagging their heads<sup>40</sup> and saying, 'You who are going to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross.'<sup>41</sup> In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking him and saying,<sup>42</sup> 'He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe in him.'<sup>43</sup> He trusts in God; let God rescue him now, if He delights in him'; for he said, 'I am the Son of God.'<sup>44</sup> The *lestai* who had been crucified with him were also insulting him with the same words.<sup>45</sup> Now from the sixth hour darkness fell upon all the land until the ninth hour.<sup>46</sup> About the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, 'Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?' that is, 'My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?'<sup>47</sup> And some of those who were standing there, when they heard it, began saying, 'This man is calling for Elijah.'<sup>48</sup> Immediately one of them ran, and taking a sponge, he filled it with sour wine and put it on a reed, and gave him a drink.<sup>49</sup> But the rest of them said, '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.<sup>51</sup> And behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth shook and the rocks were split.<sup>52</sup> The tombs were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised;<sup>53</sup> and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they entered the holy city and appeared to many.<sup>54</sup> Now the centurion, and those who were with him keeping guard over Jesus, when they saw the earthquake and the things that were happening, became very frightened and said, 'Truly this was the Son of God!'

## Questions

1. What are the motivations of the various characters in this story? The Jewish leaders: envy
  - a. Did the Jews expect their King to be killed in this humiliating way? How did they therefore look at Jesus?
    - i. Recall that crucifixion is the Roman death penalty for political traitors and revolutionaries. It was intended to publicly humiliate the victim and put fear into the public. The Jews feared and hated the cross as a symbol. To them, it meant that Caesar still held power over them, and that God still had not brought Israel out of Exile. To them, Jesus looks God-forsaken and cursed.
    - ii. What kind of taunts do the two *lestai* (which means 'revolutionaries') throw at Jesus? What do the chief priests say? What are they thinking? They're making fun of Jesus and his claims, but they're also taunting him. 'Prove it.' 'The Messiah shouldn't be humbled this way, they think
    - iii. Why do they think coming down from the cross would be evidence that Jesus is the Son of God? Because if he did that, he would fight the Romans. Bear in mind that this is one reason why some non-Christian Jews today continue to reject Jesus as Messiah. Do you think their reasoning is right?
      1. They believed that the Messiah would bring Israel out of Exile and lead them in a new Passover independence day. Jesus believed that he would have to plunge into the depths of Israel's Exile and share in it, in order to offer people a way through it into new type of Passover deliverance.
      2. How did Jesus come to believe this? From all over the Old Testament. Isaiah foresaw the Messiah sharing in Israel's Exile (Isa.53)
    - iv. (optional) Who else taunted Jesus to prove his identity as 'Son of God'? Satan in the wilderness in Mt.4:1 – 11, when he said twice, 'If you are the Son of God...' What similarity does that have to this event?
  - b. So Jesus gets lumped in and compared with other Jewish revolutionaries. In what sense is Jesus a revolutionary? Reminder: What day is this happening on? Passover. It's the day when the slaves went free. There is a lot of irony here. What's ironic about Barabbas being set free while Jesus is taken captive? It's an echo of Passover. (The Day of Atonement motif is also here, where one goat is taken and the other goat goes free into the wilderness. But the Day of Atonement is itself a motif of Passover, where a Passover Lamb was slain and Israel went free into the wilderness).
2. What are the motivations of the various characters in this story? Pilate: avoid a riot, political appeasement
3. What are the motivations of the various characters in this story? Barabbas: incite a revolution again
4. What are the motivations of the various characters in this story? Roman centurions: entertain themselves, projecting their subjugation onto Jesus?
5. What is Jesus' motivation? This is what we'll discover... One motive: To demonstrate his innocence. How is Jesus' innocence shown here?
  - a. His character
  - b. Pilate identifies the Jewish leaders' motivation as envy (27:18).
  - c. Pilate's wife says that he is a righteous – and hence, innocent – man (27:19).
  - d. Pilate himself declares that Jesus is innocent (27:23 – 24).
6. Jesus' second motive: To demonstrate his identity. How do the Roman centurions ironically confirm Jesus' identity as the king of Israel, the Son of God?
  - a. What titles are used of Jesus? They are basically synonyms for 'son of God.'
    - i. 'Christ' or Messiah in v.17 and 22
    - ii. 'King of the Jews' in v.11, 29 and 36
    - iii. 'King of Israel' in v.42
    - iv. 'Son of God' in v.40, 43, and 54
  - b. They give him a mock coronation.
  - c. They put a placard up with his name and title.
7. Jesus' third motive: To gather witnesses. What does it mean that a Roman centurion says in v.54, 'Truly this was the Son of God!'
  - a. Who has he seen Jesus set free, in a sense?
    - i. Barabbas from death, in v.11 – 26
    - ii. The dead from death, in v.38 – 54

- b. He is impressed enough with Jesus' character that he calls him a title that he was normally only supposed to call Caesar, 'son of a god.' But he perceives the God of Israel behind Jesus, and says, 'Son of [the] God!' This is what the God of Israel is really like, in other words.
  - c. It represents how the Gentiles will identify the God of Israel in the human person of Jesus, and will identify Jesus as the king of humanity.
8. How does Jesus take on the symbols of the sin of his predecessors? In particular, other 'sons of God'?
- a. **Adam** was considered a 'firstborn son of God' (Gen.2:7; Lk.3:38) but fell into sin. As a result of the fall, Adam and Eve realized they were *naked* (Gen.3:7) and *thorns* emerged from the ground (Gen.3:17 – 19). The Roman centurions strip Jesus naked (Mt.27:28). They press a crown of thorns onto his head (Mt.27:27). Thus, the emblems of humanity's sin are pressed onto Jesus.
  - b. **Israel** was chosen by God to be a 'firstborn son of God' (Ex.4:22 – 23; Rom.9:4) but also fell into sin. Israel's sin was *scarlet* in color because of their bloodshed (Isa.1:18). A Jew sinful enough to be *hung on a tree* was cursed by God and outside the covenant (Dt.21:23). The Roman centurions put a scarlet tunic on Jesus (Mt.27:28 – 31), symbolizing the sin he was entering and taking onto himself. He was also hung on a tree by crucifixion (Mt.27:35ff.)
  - c. **The Davidic kings** were chosen by God to be a 'firstborn son of God' (Ps.2:7 – 8), but also fell into sin, starting from David himself. David asked, '*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*' (Ps.22:1). Jesus also cried out the same thing (Mt.27:46), entering into David's role as king, his sin, and his forsakenness.
    - i. (optional) Why does Jesus quote Psalm 22? (If you have time, read Psalm 22 in its entirety and compare it to Mt.27:38 – 66).
      - 1. To show his emotional state of feeling abandoned by God and handed over to the Gentiles
      - 2. To show his hope in God, since the second half of Psalm 22 is about trust in God's deliverance.
      - 3. To establish a deeper link between himself and David. David was the founding and greatest King spiritually, and prepared to build the Temple, which began after he died. Perhaps Jesus is going to build a different kind of Temple (of people, not stones, and this is hinted at by the mention of people raised from the dead), which would begin after he died, too?
      - 4. To argue with the chief priests and *lestai*. David suffered rejection and persecution by the Gentiles before he formally become Israel's king. So it is possible for Jesus to suffer this way and still be the rightful King as well. This is an attempt to get them to see the connection. Jesus is still reaching out to the chief priests and *lestai*.
    - d. **Barabbas** means 'son of the father.' He was going to die, but Jesus takes his place.
9. What does that represent? It means that Jesus enters into the fullness of human sin. He takes the curse of sin onto himself. Not in place of us, because people have already suffered this, but in solidarity with us. Jesus joins us in all of our predicament, our dilemma, our ironic sin and disobedience. He unites himself to us in our lostness, and even in our death. But he is innocent throughout. His death and resurrection – and us joining ourselves to him by faith – will be God's way out for us. In other words, God comes to substitute himself for humanity by joining himself to us.
- a. Application: What does it mean to you that Jesus enters into the worst possible thing we can do or imagine doing? He joins himself to us there, in that place.
  - b. Illus: It's like plunging into deep water to rescue a drowned person, then drowning in the rescue effort to tie a rope around the drowned person, then to be pulled back up with the person, and both people are resuscitated.
10. What do you think is the hardest part of this experience for Jesus?
11. What does God suggest that Jesus' death means?
- a. Darkness from noon (the sixth hour) to 3pm (the ninth hour). That's very strange. It's a reversal of time.
  - b. The Temple reflects 'heaven.' The earthquake affects 'earth.' Jesus' death therefore shook 'heaven and earth' as he predicted in Mt.24:29. What does that signify? It is the end of an old age and the beginning of a new one.
  - c. Thus, the death and resurrection of Jesus will be a reversal, a turning point in the ages of the world, a shaking of everything down to its foundations.