



The King's Ransom

Matthew 20:28

Text

Matthew 27:27-44

Topic

Jesus chooses to give His life on the Cross
out of obedience to His Father and love for us

Title

"Cross My Heart & Chose to Die"

Introduction

When Jesus cried out, *"It is finished!"*, and died on the Cross, do you think that the devil thought he had won his long war against God?

It's probably not a good idea to speculate on what the devil thought or thinks. But I've heard it taught, and have probably repeated the teaching, that Satan believed he was victorious when Jesus died.

C.S. Lewis illustrated this in his classic story, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. Aslan, the Lion King who represents Jesus, took the place of Edward and died the death Edward deserved. The witch, who represents Satan, thought she was victorious.

But Aslan reappeared, surprising the witch, because, in Lewis' story, there was a deeper 'magic' that the witch knew nothing about.

I'm not so sure we can honestly say that Satan was unaware of what might happen should Jesus die. After all, Jesus had been forthcoming about going to the Cross as a sacrifice for the sins of the world.

God addressed Satan in the Garden of Eden, right after mankind sinned, promising to come Himself as the Savior, and die. The devil saw God slay an animal - probably a lamb or maybe two - in order to cover Adam and Eve's sin until He would come.

Satan would have understood John the Baptist's declaration concerning Jesus, "Behold the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world!"

Jesus had made no secret of the fact that, if He were to be crucified, He would draw all men to himself.

What am I getting at? In the account of His crucifixion that we find in the Gospel of Matthew, there seems to be an emphasis on mocking Jesus **in order to get Him to come down off the Cross.**

- In verse forty, "if you are the Son of God, **come down** from the Cross."

- In verse forty-two, "let him **come down** now from the Cross, and we will believe him."
- In verse forty-four, "even the robbers who were crucified with Him reviled Him with **the same thing.**"

I'm not saying Satan understood all the ramifications of Jesus' substitutionary death for us. I'm not saying Satan, who the Bible describes as a "murderer from the beginning," wasn't elated that Jesus had died.

I am seeing though, in this text, that there was a powerful temptation, incited by Satan, for Jesus to come down off the Cross.

Had He done so, there would be no forgiveness of sins, no reconciliation of God with mankind, no eternal life in a glorious Heaven in fellowship with our Creator.

As we work through the verses, remember something else about the Cross. Jesus had told His disciples that they, too, would take up their Cross.

This text is not about us; not directly. But we are in it, as those called upon to follow after the Lord, taking up our Cross.

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 You'll Be Tested By The Weight Of The Cross You Take Up For Jesus, and #2 You'll Be Tempted To Withdraw From The Cross You Take Up For Jesus.

#1 You'll Be Tested By The Weight Of The Cross You Take Up For Jesus

(v27-37)

It's been insightfully said that if Jesus had not been nailed to the Cross, love would have held Him there.

True, and blessedly so. But we must recognize that it emphasizes the fact that dying on the Cross, including all the terror and suffering that led up to it, were a choice Jesus made.

He could have stopped His torment at any point.

He could have come down from the Cross.

As we work through these verses, think of how powerful an incentive the pain and torture - both physical and spiritual - were for Jesus to cry "*Uncle!*" instead of seeing it through and crying out to His Father, "It is finished!"

Mat 27:27 Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole garrison around Him.

A "garrison" was six hundred soldiers. It's not likely all of them were involved; just those on-duty at the time.

A word of encouragement: You never know when Jesus might, in a spiritual way, become the subject of your everyday activities. Be ready to take advantage of it.

From a review of the other Gospel accounts, it seems that Pontius Pilate was on hand to witness the soldiers mistreating Jesus.

Mat 27:28 And they stripped Him and put a scarlet robe on Him.

This wasn't something they normally did. It was specifically designed to mock Jesus' claim to be King of the Jews.

How much mocking can *you* take? Before you answer, add to it torture during the mocking. Then consider that, at any moment, you could choose to end the mocking and the torture.

If Jesus, being fully human, had a point at which He would snap, and take up His divine attributes, Satan was trying to find it.

Think of the devil, at the Cross, as one of those guys in movies, who is the torturer, who never fails to break his subject. He always has some incredible device or devices for inflicting pain in order to achieve his goal.

Mat 27:29 When they had twisted a crown of thorns, they put it on His head, and a reed in His right hand. And they bowed the knee before Him and mocked Him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!"

They literally *pressed* it down upon His head, causing great physical pain.

A crown of thorns is so appropriate though, is it not, to symbolize the suffering of our Lord and King?

Mat 27:30 Then they spat on Him, and took the reed and struck Him on the head.

There's something disgusting about being spit on. Again, it's a combination of physical abuse with spiritual abuse.

Mat 27:31 And when they had mocked Him, they took the robe off Him, put His own clothes on Him, and led Him away to be crucified.

The scholars who figure-out timelines think that Jesus was mistreated by the soldiers for about two hours.

Four of them would lead Him away to be crucified.

Mat 27:32 Now as they came out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name. Him they compelled to bear His cross.

Condemned men carried their cross to the place of crucifixion. Scholars cannot agree as to whether or not a criminal carried the entire cross, dragging it behind; or just the 100-pound cross-bar, strapped to the shoulders, which would then be attached to the vertical part waiting at the crucifixion site.

It seems predictable that a person would fall under the weight of it. Jesus especially was weakened by the ordeal He had suffered in the last fifteen or so hours. His ordeal included the following:

- The tense atmosphere of the Upper Room, where Satan entered Judas.
- The betrayal by Judas.
- The agony of the Garden of Gethsemane.
- The desertion by His disciples.
- A series of six illegal trials.
- A beating from the Sanhedrin.
- The denials of Peter.
- The crowds preferring Barabbas be released rather than the Son of God.
- The pronouncement of His death sentence.

- The scourging by the Roman soldiers.
- The crown of thorns.
- All of this with the deprivation of sleep and the realization He was going to suffer and die on the Cross and take upon Himself the sins of the whole world.

Simon would have been coming in to Jerusalem, to go to the Temple, to offer the sacrifice of his Passover lamb. On his way in, he encountered a crucifixion procession.

Did you know that, if the court needs to call a jury and they've run-out of potential jurors, the bailiff can come out into the Government Center courtyard and compel you to be a juror?
Don't say I didn't warn you.

One source I searched said that travel from Cyrene to Jerusalem could take a month or more. The Passover was, therefore, a pretty big deal to Simon.

Helping Jesus would immediately disqualify Simon from the Passover ceremonies, because would come into contact with blood. Talk about ruining your plans!

Regarding Simon, Warren Wiersbe writes,

[In his Gospel] Mark referred to Simon as though the people reading his Gospel would recognize him [calling him] “the father of Alexander and Rufus” (Mar 15:21). Apparently these two sons were well-known members of the church. It seems likely that this humiliating experience resulted in Simon’s conversion as well as in the conversion of his family. Simon came to Jerusalem to sacrifice his Passover lamb, and he met the Lamb of God who was sacrificed for him.

Mat 27:33 And when they had come to a place called Golgotha, that is to say, Place of a Skull,

The Latin word for "Golgotha" is *Calvaria*, where we get our English word, Calvary. A couple of thoughts on the Place of a Skull:

1. Some say that the site bears this name because, from a distance, it resembles a skull. There is such a site in Israel, and many believe it to be the place of the crucifixion. However, others point out that it likely looks that way on account of excavations in the Middle Ages, and did not resemble a skull in the first century.
2. Others say the site derived its name from the simple fact it was the normal place of execution, and so many had died there.

Truth is, we do not know the site of Calvary, not for certain.

Mat 27:34 they gave Him sour wine mingled with gall to drink. But when He had tasted it, He would not drink.

Mark says they offered Jesus wine mingled with myrrh, and he refused it; Matthew, that they offered him wine mingled with gall, and he tasted it and then refused it.

One source explains this seeming contradiction like this:

Myrrh may have been used with wine to strengthen the drink but it has no effect on pain. But myrrh tastes bitter; so a large dose of it mingled with wine would make the latter undrinkable. Whether customary or not, the drink was offered to Jesus; but it was so bitter he refused it, and, according to this view, the soldiers were

amused. Mark keeps the word “myrrh” to describe the content, and Matthew uses “gall” to describe the taste...

If that is true, it means that the soldiers were still mocking Jesus. They offered Him something to dull His pain, but in a form that was undrinkable - simply to be cruel.

Mat 27:35 Then they crucified Him...

Four words. None of the Gospels describes in graphic detail the crucifixion. If the Gospel writers, who were inspired by the Holy Spirit in what they wrote, said little, then so should we.

Mat 27:35 Then they crucified Him, and divided His garments, casting lots, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet: "THEY DIVIDED MY GARMENTS AMONG THEM, AND FOR MY CLOTHING THEY CAST LOTS."

The prophecy is from Psalm Twenty-two. We'll have more to say about Psalm Twenty-two when we get to verse forty-six, where Jesus says, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" Those words are the opening line of Psalm Twenty-two; and many commentators believe that Jesus would have not stopped there, but would have recited the entire psalm.

Most of you know that it predicts, with 100% accuracy, Jesus' suffering on the Cross, about 400 years before it happened.

One of the things we read in Psalm Twenty-two, in verse twelve, is, "Many bulls have compassed me: strong bulls of Bashan have beset me round."

Bashan is mentioned sixty times in the Bible. Bashan was a city on the east side of the Jordan River. Og, who was king of Bashan, was the last of a line of giants that Moses was to conquer.

There are those who believe that Bashan was the land where the fallen angels, who married the sons of men in Genesis chapter six, dwelt. Thus, the prophecy could very well be referring to the demonic spiritual forces that were present around the Cross.

It's one biblical reason I feel comfortable saying that the devil was at the Cross.

Mat 27:36 Sitting down, they kept watch over Him there.

Mat 27:37 And they put up over His head the accusation written against Him: THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS.

Hanging there, on the Cross, Jesus was *exactly* the King predicted centuries earlier by Isaiah:

Isa 52:14 Just as many were astonished at you, So His visage was marred more than any man, And His form more than the sons of men;

Isa 53:5 But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed.

Isa 53:7 He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, And as a sheep before its shearers is silent, So He opened not His mouth.

In the Book of Hebrews we are told, concerning the Cross, to "[look] unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (12:2).

You, and I, were the joy set before Jesus; our salvation. He pushed beyond any breaking point in order to save us.

I mentioned the comment of Jesus to His followers earlier in His ministry, when He said,

Mat 16:24 ... "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.

Mat 16:25 "For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.

People have twisted this to describe something in their lives that is a terrible burden, describing it as "a cross to bear," and giving the impression that they'd get rid of it if only they could.

We understand it to mean that following Jesus requires 100% commitment of our lives, including dying for Him if it becomes necessary in order to obey Him.

He endured His Cross for you - for the joy set before Him. We are to endure our Cross for Him - for the simple joy of obeying Him, anticipating seeing Him, and looking full in His wonderful face.

We can learn things about what taking up a Cross is like from seeing Jesus as He took up His. One thing we see is that, at one point, His Cross became too heavy for Him. He fell under its crushing weight. He had to be helped.

That tells me that there may come times in your life that taking up your cross becomes so heavy, so crushing, that you fall under it.

I don't mean you fall into sin. I mean that something - some news, some condition, some event - halts you in your tracks, and you feel like you're being crushed.

The apostle Paul put it this way: "for we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble which came to us in Asia: that we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, **so that we despaired even of life**" (Second Corinthians 1:8).

God will see to it you are enabled to continue. He will provide a Simon of His own choosing; it could be a person or persons, but it need not be restricted to that.

Realize that God will provide you with a Simon, He will enable you, to go on taking up your Cross and thereby dying to yourself. Taking up the Cross is meant to be permanent; it's lifelong.

You are dying to self everyday more-and-more, until you are dead.

**#2 You'll Be Tempted To Withdraw
From The Cross You Take Up For Jesus**
(v38-44)

When we read the Gospels we almost always want to give what's called a harmony of the Gospels. We want to put all the accounts together, and give a moment-by-moment commentary.

There's a place for that. But sometimes, in doing that, we can miss the peculiar emphasis a particular Gospel might introduce.

In these remaining verses, Matthew emphasizes the crowd at the Cross mocking Jesus by demanding He come down from the Cross and save Himself.

Since we know that Jesus was in control of His own life, even on the Cross, we should see this as a genuine temptation; and one that, if succumbed to, would have overthrown the whole plan of salvation.

Mat 27:38 Then two robbers were crucified with Him, one on the right and another on the left.

Robbery was not a capital crime. It's likely that the three crosses that day were for Barabbas and two of his associates.

Jesus took Barabbas' place as His substitute. The whole scene depicts Him taking the place of all men as the substitutionary atonement for their sin. The two thieves represent all of humanity, who are potentially saved, but only if you believe.

We read of the two men, in verse forty-four,

Mat 27:44 Even the robbers who were crucified with Him reviled Him with the same thing.

Now we know one of these criminals believed Jesus and was saved. But, notice, that is not Matthew's emphasis. He omits that incredible detail. He wants us instead focused on the concerted efforts of *everyone* at the Cross to tempt Jesus to save Himself.

Mat 27:39 And those who passed by blasphemed Him, wagging their heads

Mat 27:40 and saying, "You who destroy the temple and build it in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross."

"If you are the Son of God" sounds familiar. Twice, in his wilderness temptation of Jesus (back in chapter four), the devil had approached the Lord, saying, "If you are the Son of God."

It's yet another reason we can be confident Satan was at the Cross.

In the desert, Jesus had been weakened by forty days of fasting. At the Cross, well, He was reduced to something barely human - both in appearance and what we would call strength.

Jesus once said, "no one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father" (John 10:18).

It was, strictly speaking, up to Jesus to decide if He was going to finish what He had started.

Mat 27:41 Likewise the chief priests also, mocking with the scribes and elders, said,

Mat 27:42 "He saved others; Himself He cannot save. If He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him.

Mat 27:43 He trusted in God; let Him deliver Him now if He will have Him; for He said, 'I am the Son of God.' "

"We will believe Him." Wasn't that the goal - to be *believed* and *received* by the nation of Israel, as their King?

Yes... and No. Several times in Jesus' life, He shows that He was a man on a mission. He had a purpose, which He intended to fulfill. Even at a young age, Jesus knew that He "must be about [His] Father's business" (Luke 2:49). In the last days of His earthly life, Jesus "resolutely set out for Jerusalem," where He knew He would be killed (Luke 9:51).

Jesus put it this way in Luke 19:10: "The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

Because He would save others, Jesus would not save Himself. He could have saved Himself; but He would not, and He did not.

By His obedience unto death, He draws all men to Himself, to save those who, by the grace of God, believe on Him.

Back up for a minute. Prior to the Cross, Satan tried to keep Jesus from going to the Cross in ways besides the wilderness temptation:

1. First, he tried to have Jesus killed, as an infant, by inciting Herod to kill all the children under two years of age.
2. At the very beginning of His public ministry, Satan incited the members of the local synagogue to try to throw Jesus off of a cliff.
3. Satan was involved when Peter tried to talk Jesus out of going to the Cross. You remember that Jesus addressed Peter in a way that outed the devil, saying, "Get behind Me, Satan."

Jesus kept focused on the Cross. He spoke openly of dying there, and of what it would accomplish. Satan kept trying to block Jesus from going to the Cross, either by getting Him to avoid it, or by killing Him prematurely.

We know that the Jews did not have the legal right to execute anyone. But that didn't stop them, in the Book of Acts, from stoning Stephen to death.

Satan may have hoped that the Jews would have stoned Jesus to death, for blasphemy, without sending Him to Pontius Pilate, thus nullifying the prophecies of the Cross.

On the Cross, Satan was tempting Jesus to come down. The Lord was at His weakest point, physically speaking. If ever He might take up His own life again, it was as He hung there.

He did not come down. As we sing in one of our choruses,

*You did it for me, You did it for love
It's Your victory, Jesus You are enough
Because of Your cross my debt is paid
Because of Your blood my sins are washed away
Now all of my life, I freely give
Because of Your love I live*

Satan's not done trying to defeat the plan of God. Among his current strategies, he's trying to exterminate all Jews from planet earth, which would nullify God's many promises to return to a remnant, save them, and establish the promised Kingdom of Heaven on the earth.

We are to take up the Cross; and Jesus is our example. From this account in Matthew, we learn that as we take up the Cross, we will be tempted to abandon it.

It could be a total abandonment, what we call apostasy, as a person denies the Lord.

More often it is what we call backsliding, as we simply refuse to obey the Lord in some area or areas.

Disobedience is, effectively, us laying down the Cross, for some selfish reason.

I quoted Hebrews 12:2 earlier:

Heb 12:2 [look to] Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

The writer applies that truth in the very next verse:

Heb 12:3 For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.

Is the Cross crushing you today? Then a Simon will be compelled by God to help you. It may be a person; it may be a verse from God's Word. God has many resources. Wait for it; he, or she, or it, will come. Don't restrict God's source to any one person or thing; accept His help in whatever form it takes.

Are you thinking about laying down the Cross, even for a moment, while you put yourself first? Are you entertaining the thought, "God wants me to be happy," as a way of overruling what you know to be God's will for your life?

Turn and look at Jesus, on the Cross, barely recognizable as a person; He did it for you... He did it for love... It can bring **you** victory - the victory of obedience, and the joy set before you, of seeing Jesus face-to-face.