

At the foot of the Cross

by David E. Thiele

In Matthew chapter 27, Matthew, also known as Levi the tax collector, records an incident that takes place at the foot of the cross during the crucifixion of our Savior.

Look at Matthew 27, verses 41 to 43

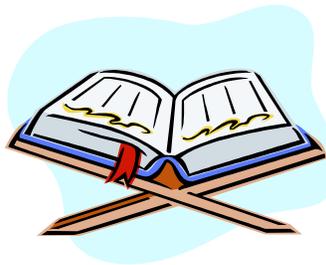
41 In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking Him and saying, **42** “He saved others; He cannot save Himself. He is the King of Israel; let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe in Him. **43** He trusts in God; let God rescue him now, if he delights in Him: for he said, ‘I am the Son of God.’ ”

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The chief priests, scribes and elders were mocking Jesus. “He saved others” – they knew of Jesus’ extensive healing ministry. They had their spies and cronies out trying to catch Jesus in a fault. They heard how He had raised Jarius’ daughter from the dead. They had heard how He broke up a funeral and gave the widow of Nain back her son. They knew about the raising of Lazarus from the dead after four days. It didn’t matter if people had been dead half an hour or half a week – Jesus raised them from the dead.

“He is the king of Israel.” There was a sign on the cross that read, “THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS.” But these men didn’t want Jesus as their king. They had been among those that said, “We have no king but Caesar.”

They said, “Let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe in Him.” A wicked and adulterous generation seeks after a sign. Would they have believed? No – remember the account of poor Lazarus and the rich man? The rich man suffering in torment begged Abraham to send Lazarus back to warn his brothers of the horrible place he was in. What did Abraham say? If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets – If they do not *listen to the scriptures* – they will not believe even if someone rises from the dead.



“He trusts in God” – Jesus did trust in God the Father – He came to do the Father’s will. He would demonstrate that total trust a while later when He said, “**Father into Your hands I commit My Spirit.**”

“Let God rescue Him now, if He delights in Him.” God did delight in Jesus – Remember the baptism of Jesus? In Matthew 3:17 God spoke from heaven and said, “**This is My beloved Son – In whom I am well pleased.**”

For He said, “I am the Son of God.” Jesus claimed to be God in the flesh. These men thought this to be blasphemy. But, Jesus was God in the flesh – God incarnate. He cast out demons, healed the sick, stilled the storms and raised the dead. But, it wasn’t enough for these men. And it isn’t enough for multitudes of people even today.

Psalms 22 is a prophetic writing about the crucifixion. The chief priests, scribes and elders didn’t realize it but by their very words they were fulfilling prophecy. Jesus stripped and beaten - a crown of thorns on his head as a cruel mockery of His Royalty.

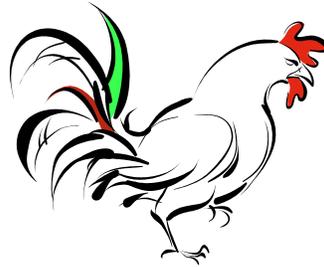


We look back in recent history. Some of us remember Neil Armstrong being the first man to walk on the moon. Some of us remember the Berlin wall being torn down. We remember the terrible events of September 11th, two-thousand and one. And we’ve seen the first African-American elected President of the United States. Good or bad we sensed history in the making. But these men, these men standing at the foot of the Cross, were witnessing one of the most pivotal events in all of human history and it would have eternal implications. Yet, they had no idea. They had no inkling of what was unfolding right before their eyes.

It was a sad time. It was a dark time. For six hours Jesus would hang between heaven and earth. Suffering – suffering. But even in the midst of that came words of hope. Jesus the intercessor – Jesus the Advocate was already pleading on our behalf, “**Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.**” Words of hope in a seemingly hopeless situation.

Can we act Holier than thou when we put ourselves at the foot of the cross on that fateful day? Some might say, “I would comfort Mary – No parent should ever witness the death of their child, let alone one so horrible and excruciating.” Some may say, “I would encourage the disciples telling them we can’t see the big picture – we only see part of the puzzle we must trust that God knows what He is doing.”

Some might even be so honest as to say, “I would watch from afar - hoping no one would approach and accuse me of being one of His followers – knowing that I might do what Peter did in the courtyard and even deny that I knew Jesus.”



So what meaning does this passage have for me? Like brother Andy has said, “*We all have different stories.*” Mine is that I didn’t become a Christian until I was twenty-four years old. I was raised in a religious home. Like these men, I knew about Jesus – I just didn’t know Him as my Lord and Savior. So the first part of my life was a living mockery of Christ. I picture myself right there mocking and spitting at Jesus as He hangs on the cross. I can picture myself in the crowd just hours earlier shouting, “*Crucify Him, Crucify Him!*” I can picture myself driving the nails into His flesh that would tear as He hung on that instrument of death.

So what changed? *Listening to the scriptures* – Later the Bible says that many of the priests were being saved – they had ready access to the scriptures. They could check out the prophecies Jesus fulfilled. They began to see God’s plan, they began to understand, and they put their faith, trust and belief in Jesus.

Someone cared enough to open the scriptures to me. They said, “*Do you see? Do you understand? Do you believe?*” And God in His loving mercy removed the scales from my eyes, as it were, so I could see, understand and believe.

I belonged on the cross. **I** should have been the one dying for my sin. **I** should have been condemned for all eternity. It was **my** sin that put Jesus there. In **His** immeasurable love **He** took **my** place – **He** took the punishment for **my** sin.

So I found myself at the foot of the cross beating my breast and saying, “*Lord, be merciful to me a sinner.*” And He was.

My question to you is *Do you see? Do you understand? Do you believe?*