

The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 1 March 2026. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced and see the context for yourself. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.

The Glory of the Cross

Matthew 27:35-44

In our childhood, we probably all heard a story or two about some king “in a land far, far away,” who took off his royal robes, put on commoners’ clothes, and went out among his subjects, so that he could interact with them. (Of course, in such stories, the king always encounters a few rude citizens, who, not realising that he is their king, treat him with contempt.) However, such stories don’t happen merely in children’s storybooks. There have actually been many monarchs in the past who have gone out *incognito* among the common people. One well-known case was when **Peter the Great**, the Czar of Russia, conducted his “Great Experiment.” In 1697, Peter left the royal court of Russia, and went on a mission to Western Europe. At the invitation of King William III, Peter went to Holland, disguised himself as a common labourer, and worked in the dockyards, so that he could learn about the latest advancements in shipbuilding. At William’s invitation, he also went to England in 1698, and mingled with the labourers in the English shipyards. He went under the name “Peter Mikhailov”; but many people easily saw through his disguise. (Being nearly seven feet tall, and having a heavy Russian accent, he *really* stood out. Dockyard workers may not have suspected anything; but most people of rank had heard about his mission, and knew who he was.) Now, other monarchs did have more success in disguising themselves. **King Charles XI** of Sweden went out dressed as a commoner to see if he could catch local officials who had been compromised; and he was quite successful. Whenever he caught an official in the act of taking a bribe, he removed his old grey coat, revealed his royal garments underneath, and order the man’s arrest. There was also **Matthias Corvinus**, the king of Hungary in the 1400’s. He frequently went in disguise among his people, to see what their needs, thoughts, and concerns were. There was even one occasion when he disguised himself as a food vendor, went the behind enemy line of the Turks, and gathered sensitive intelligence from them. Some kings have had no *choice* but to disguise themselves as commoners. For example, **King Charles II** of England had to pass himself off as a woodsman named “William Jackson” for six weeks, as he was fleeing from the forces of Oliver Cromwell. As he slinked from one hiding place to another, loyal subjects helped him to imitate local accents, carry himself like a peasant, and get past military checkpoints, until he finally escaped to mainland Europe.

A king’s passing himself off as a commoner can be risky business; and it has sometimes ended in disaster. However, no “king to commoner” mission was ever *more* successful than the one that the King of glory conducted 2,000 years ago. No king ever stooped so low as the Son of God stooped when He came down from Heaven, and took on human flesh. Though He looked like any other man, His identity as God was no secret; and it wasn’t *meant* to be kept secret. On the night of His birth, an army of angels announced that the Messiah, the Saviour of the world, had been born; and in the three years of His ministry, Christ *proved*, by His mighty miracles, that He is the Messiah and King of Israel. Jesus veiled Himself in

human flesh not to escape recognition, but to meet sinners where they were, and to serve them, and offer Himself to them as Lord and Saviour. Christ didn't come to *hide* His identity: He came to *reveal* His identity as the Son of God. However, His ultimate reason for wearing the "robe" of flesh was that He might die on the cross, as the Substitute for sinners. Jesus came to suffer the death of the cross, so that we might be saved. Christ's death on the cross wasn't a failure: it was the greatest *victory* in history. That is what we will be talking about this morning, in this message which I've entitled ***The Glory of the Cross.***

Read Matthew 27:35-44.

I. The crucifixion of Christ (v. 35)

There is a clear statement that Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John all made in their Gospels, in nearly identical wording. The statement is, "***And they crucified him.***" For the people who lived in the Roman world, no explanation of this statement was needed. From earliest childhood, *everyone* witnessed crucifixions in public places. Sometimes the Romans nailed their victim to a single stake (called a *stauros*); but usually, the stake had a crossbeam attached to it, on which the person's arms were stretched out: and his hands were pierced separately to each end of that crossbeam. We know that in Jesus' case, He was nailed to a cross, and not a single stake, because in **John 20**, we are told that Thomas said, "***Except I see in his hands the print of the nails (plural), and put my finger into the print of the nails (plural), and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe.***" Jesus didn't have one nail driven through both hands; He had a nail driven through each individual hand. By the way, in 1968, in Israel, archaeologists discovered a Roman crucifixion nail, still embedded in the heel bone of its victim; and this nail was seven inches long, and 3/8 inch thick. *That* is the type of nail that was driven through Jesus' hands. The nails were driven not through the palms of Jesus' hands, but between the two bones of the forearm, just below each wrist, so that the nails could hold up the weight of His body.

Now, crucifixion was not a new thing. It began with the Assyrians and Babylonians; and it was carried from Persia, to Greece, and finally to Rome, where the Romans perfected it into a science. One thing is certain, though: crucifixion was *not* around in the time of King David. It was totally unknown. Why, then, did David speak about his hands and feet being *pierced*?

Read Psalm 22:16.

Though King David was the human author of **Psalm 22**, the real Author of this psalm was the Son of God. The first 21 verses of this psalm are a prophecy of Christ's crucifixion. Christ, the second Person of the Godhead spoke through David, and used him to write down this description of what He would one day endure on the cross.

Now, let's break this down. First, Christ says, "***For dogs have compassed me.***" Who are these "***dogs***"? They were His *enemies*—and particularly, His Roman enemies. In Bible times (and even to this day), Jews referred to Gentiles as "dogs"; and even Jesus used the term "dogs" on one occasion. When the Syrophenician woman pleaded with Jesus to cast the demon out of her daughter, Jesus told her that it wasn't appropriate to give food to the "***dogs***" (literally, "puppies," or "house dogs"), until it had first been given to the "children" of the house. Of course, Christ loved and cared for the Gentiles; and He often ministered to them, *after* He had first ministered to the Jews. The wall between Jew and Gentile would soon be broken down; but in the meantime, the Gentiles that Jesus healed and saved were like "family pets" in God's household.

Now, in contrast to *believing* Gentiles, who were like "puppies under the table," the Gentiles who scourged and crucified Jesus did not have faith in the Lord. They were "dogs" in the truest sense of the word. Spiritually, they had the character of fierce, wild dogs. However, the Jewish leaders were just as much "dogs," in the spiritual sense, as the Roman soldiers were. They were all one big "***assembly of the wicked.***" The "***whole assembly of the congregation of Israel***" was gathered in Jerusalem at that time to celebrate Passover; but instead of honouring the Lord, they assembled together with the Gentiles to murder Jesus.

Now, in the last part of this verse, we find a very specific prophecy of Christ's crucifixion. These words could not possibly describe any physical suffering that King David ever endured. We are told that the people "***pierced***" His hands and His feet. Other Old Testament prophecies speak of this piercing of Jesus, as well. In **Isaiah 53:5**, Isaiah says, "***But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities.***" The Hebrew word for "wounded" (*chalal*) literally means "pierced"! The LORD also said, in **Zechariah 12:10**, that one day the Jewish people will "***look upon me whom they have pierced,***" and will "***mourn***" for Him, when they finally realise that He is the Messiah whom they had rejected for so long.

To this day, those nail prints are still in Jesus' hands. Jesus showed these nail prints to the disciples on the day of His resurrection, to prove that He was really risen from the dead. Someday, we who have placed our faith in Jesus will see those nail prints in His hands, too; and throughout eternity, they will be a continual reminder of Christ's incredible love for us!

II. The collared clothing (vv. 35-36)

(Read Matthew 27:35-36.) Throughout the long, dark hours of Jesus' arrest, trial, and crucifixion, one prophecy after another was being fulfilled; and one of these prophecies was the prophecy that Christ's clothing would be stolen, and gambled over. The prophecy that Matthew was citing was from **Psalm 22**. Let's look at that Scripture.

Read Psalm 22:17-18.

In these verses, we find two more specific prophecies that were fulfilled while Jesus was hanging on the cross. First, Christ foretold of how He would be able to *"tell"* all His *"bones."* This means that every part of His frame was exposed, for all to see. His body was stretched out in an extremely painful, unnatural position; and as He looked down, He was able to "tell" (or "count") the bones that protruded from His skin. (Some of His bones may have even been exposed, since much flesh had been ripped from His torso.) Christ also foretold that the people would *"look and stare upon me."* The Gospel writers all recorded that Jesus was intently stared at while He was hanging on the cross. The cold indifference of the people to His suffering revealed the extreme hardness of their hearts.

However, there was yet another indignity that Christ suffered. Christ also foretold of how the people would *"part my garments among them, and cast lots on my vesture."* This gambling over Jesus' clothes is recorded in **Matthew 27, Mark 15, Luke 23, and John 19**. While Christ was crying out to His Father to forgive His enemies, His enemies were coldly watching His sufferings, and greedily fighting over who would get His one earthly possession—His clothing. Like greedy dogs, they were all gathered around to exploit Him.

To this day, there are multitudes of people are still "cashing in" on Jesus of Nazareth. **Business people** the world over "cash in" on Jesus' name at least twice a year (at Christmas and Easter), yet no more believe on Him than the Roman soldiers believed on Him. To them, Jesus is just a name by which they can make profit. Then, too, there are **apostate religious leaders**, who claim to believe in Jesus, yet no more believe on Him than the Roman soldiers did. They live in wealth and luxury, and jettison all over the world in their private jets. They enjoy the admiration of millions of devoted followers, who willingly drop their hard-earned money into their coffers. They amass unspeakable wealth by selling indulgences, or bones and relics of saints, or water from the Jordan River, or pieces of Jesus' cross, or "prayer cloths," or candles, or "miracle healings," in exchange for sizeable donations. More subtly, others make merchandise of Jesus by joining a big, wealthy church in which they know they can make good connections in the community, and thus boost their business or career prospects.

The Apostle Peter prophesied of such insincere charlatans in **2 Peter 2:1-3**; and he warned the Christians of his day that “*there shall be false teachers among you,*” who “*through covetousness shall...with feigned words make merchandise of you.*” Many people are out to “make a buck” off Jesus; and their damnation is drawing nearer by the day. Yet, by the grace of God, even these people can be transformed from selfish sinners into selfless saints. We’ll talk more about this wonderful transformation in a few moments; but first, let’s talk about...

III. The cynical citation (v. 37)

(Read Matthew 27:37 again.) In this verse, we are told that Pilate wrote an inscription on a placard, and nailed it to Jesus’ cross. In **John’s Gospel**, we are told that this inscription was written in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, so that as many people as possible could read it. Now, Matthew doesn’t give us this citation in its entirety. In fact, none of the four Gospels record the entire citation. However, when you put all four Gospel accounts together, the entire inscription reads, “**This is Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.**”

Now, you’ll notice that Matthew called this statement an “*accusation.*” Whenever a criminal was crucified, a description of that criminal’s crime was written on a placard, and was nailed to his cross, above his head. The statement “This is Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews” was Jesus’ indictment. Pilate didn’t *have* to write, “This man *claimed* to be the King of the Jews.” That wasn’t necessary. Everyone walking by would have understood that “This man is being crucified because He claimed to be the King of the Jews, and therefore committed treason against Rome.” Not only was this an accusation: it was a *mocking* accusation—and also a *warning* to any would-be messiah who might think of rebelling against Rome.

Yet, strangely enough, the Sanhedrin wasn’t satisfied with what Pilate wrote. In **John 19**, we are told that the Sanhedrin complained to Pilate and said, “**Write not, The King of the Jews; but that he said, I am the King of the Jews.**” Why were those two words, “*Ekeinos eipen*” (“He said”) so important to them? If it were so obvious that Jesus was a criminal and a false messiah, then why were the Sanhedrin members afraid of the simple statement, “This is Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews”? Obviously, these were words of mockery; yet, the Sanhedrin seemed to be afraid that people might get the wrong idea, and take it as an actual declaration that Jesus *is* the King of the Jews! Why were they so paranoid about this? Perhaps because they knew that there was something so compelling, so attractive, and so other-worldly about Jesus of Nazareth, that people *still* might be drawn to Him. Even though He was hanging on a cross in shame and disgrace, the chief priests were afraid that people just might believe on Him! The fact is that they had good reason to fear. People *did*, in fact, believe on Jesus, even as He was hanging on the cross. We know, from the testimony of Scripture, that a dying thief believed on Him; and so did some Roman soldiers!

Now, you'd think that *no one* would have been inclined to believe on Jesus as He was hanging on that cross! In fact, you'd think that later on, after Jesus' resurrection, the disciples would have tried to whitewash the crucifixion account, and make it appear *not* so brutal, gruesome, and shameful. Yet, they *didn't* whitewash it. The Gospel writers portrayed Jesus' crucifixion in all its gruesomeness. Why? Because they were not ashamed of what Jesus did on that cross. They knew that Christ's sacrifice on the cross, and His resurrection from the grave, is "***the power of God unto salvation.***" The Apostle Paul wrote, "***God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.***" The redemption that Jesus purchased for us on the cross makes the cross *glorious*, not shameful! Jesus foretold of the glory of the cross when He said, "***And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.***" On the night before His crucifixion, Jesus said, "***Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him.***" The crucifixion scene doesn't *repel* sinners; it *draws* sinners to Christ! (That is why so many people fear and hate the cross—because they know that there is something *powerful* about what happened on that cross!) Before the six hours of Christ's crucifixion were up, at least a handful of people believed on Him; and among them was the Roman centurion who had overseen Jesus' crucifixion, and some of his soldiers! After hours of observing Christ's holy character, and the divine love in His eyes, these men became very fearful, and exclaimed, "***Surely this was the Son of God.***" By faith, they believed on the Son, and were saved!

As Jesus was hanging on the cross, a literal placard hung above His head, accusing Him of His so-called "crime" of sedition. However, there was *another* kind of placard hanging above Jesus' head that day; and its accusation was against *us*. What do I mean? Well, let's go to the book of **Colossians**, and see what the Apostle Paul said about this.

Read Colossians 2:13-14.

What is this "***handwriting of ordinances***" that was nailed to Jesus' cross? It was **the legal accusation of our debt to God**. In other words, it was **God's Law!** Just as the words "This is Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews" was Rome's "accusation" against Jesus, so the Law is *God's* accusation against *us*. The Law declares us to be "guilty" before God, because we have broken His standard of His righteousness; and it leaves us without even one plea or defence. Yet, through Christ's sacrifice on the cross for our sins, the entire debt of the Law has been paid, and *cancelled*; and to those who place their faith in Christ, there is no more condemnation. When you believe on Christ, your debt is "***blotted out.***" Throughout the New Testament, we are told that the "***law of commandments***" was "***abolished***" on the cross. Jesus fulfilled the Law perfectly, by living the sinless life that we cannot live; and He paid our sin debt *in full* on the cross. This means that our condemnation has been cancelled! If it *weren't* cancelled, we would all be in serious trouble—because the Law condemns every single one of us. None of us can stand before the Law, because we have all broken it, again and again. If

we had broken it only *once*, we would *still* be condemned to eternal death in Hell. The Law declares each of us "guilty"; but God declares those who believe on the Son to be "*not* guilty." Why? But those who are "in Christ" have been made free from the Law and its condemnation.

Now, many people find this idea preposterous. They say, "Well, if the Law were really cancelled, then we could go out and live a sinful life, and still get into Heaven." Folks, nothing could be further from the truth! Christ's atonement doesn't give us freedom to *break* God's commands: it gives us freedom to *obey* His commands! This liberating principle is called "*the law of the Spirit of life.*" Through the power of the Holy Spirit, believers in Jesus are now able to do what they could *never* do by their own efforts. Through the new life that Christ imparts, Christians are able to fulfil the righteousness of the Law. The "*law of the Spirit of life*" is based on *love* for God; and love for God compels and empowers us to obey Him.

Read Romans 8:1-4.

IV. **The contempt of the crowd (vv. 39-43)**

(Read Matthew 27:39-43.) As the afternoon of the Passover wore on, the people of Israel, and the religious leaders, mocked Jesus until they had no more words to say. By uttering these words, they were fulfilling prophecy. Matthew doesn't *point out* that this was a fulfilment of prophecy; but he didn't have to point it out. The words that the people said were a clear echo of what King David wrote in **Psalm 22**.

Read Psalm 22:6-8.

One thousand years before Jesus was born, King David recorded the very words that Jesus' mockers would hurl at Him while He was hanging on the cross. These words were read in the liturgy of the synagogues year after year; and the people were very familiar with them. Now, this raises a question: "Did the people *actually realise* that what they were saying had been prophesied in Scripture?" The chief priests, scribes, and all the religious leaders of Israel were *very* familiar with **Psalm 22**; and even the common people would have been familiar with it. (The average Jew had a knowledge of Scripture that would stun most people in our modern world.) This means, then, that the people may have actually been very aware that they were echoing the words of **Psalm 22**. In fact, it may be that they quoted these words in sarcasm. On the other hand, it may be that they, in their blind rage, didn't stop to consider that what

they were saying was straight from Scripture. Either way, though, they were spiritually blinded; and they had no idea whom they were mocking!

The world still mocks the Saviour to this day. However, Christ is no longer in humiliation. He is seated on the right hand of power in Heaven; and He will *not* be trifled with. Those who reject the LORD and His Anointed One will one day be laughed at by *Him*. King David prophesied that one day, ***“He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the LORD shall have them in derision. Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure.”*** In light of this, sinners should heed King David’s advice. In the last verse of **Psalm 2**, David writes, ***“Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, which his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him.”*** The time to be reconciled to the Son, and to put your trust in Him, is *now*—because one day, it will be too late. The Bible says, ***“To day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your heart.”***

V. The contempt of the criminals (vv. 38, 44)

(Read Matthew 27:38, 44.) Not only did the unbelieving crowd show contempt to the King of Israel, but even the *criminals* on Jesus’ right and lefthand showed their contempt for Him. In this, yet another Scripture was fulfilled.

Read Isaiah 53:9, 12.

It isn’t difficult to see how these prophecies were fulfilled in Jesus Christ. ***“The wicked”*** with whom Jesus made His grave were the two criminals who were crucified on his right and lefthand. These two criminals were quickly buried at about the same time that Jesus was buried, just before the close of the Passover day. Not only did Christ give up Himself to be crucified, as though He were a criminal, but He also allowed Himself to be ***“numbered”*** with criminals. Isaiah’s statement, ***“He was numbered with the transgressors,”*** is quoted two times in the New Testament. In **Mark 15:28**, Mark wrote, ***“And the scripture was fulfilled, which saith, And he was numbered with the transgressors.”*** Also, in **Luke 22:37**, Luke records how Jesus told the disciples, ***“This that is written must yet be accomplished in me, And he was reckoned among the transgressors.”*** Mark and Luke understood this prophecy well. Christ was perceived to be a criminal; He was sentenced as though He were a criminal; and He died alongside criminals. Not only that, but He was *mocked* by the criminals. You’d think that they wouldn’t have wasted any energy to mock Jesus, since they themselves were in dire agony; yet, they went out of their way to curse His holy name, and to say, ***“If thou be the Christ, save thyself and us.”***

Yet, as the hours wore on, the same miracle that happened in the hearts of the centurion and his men began to happen in the heart of one of these criminals. Even though Jesus appeared to be just another criminal like himself, this thief couldn't help but notice that Jesus was completely unlike any other man that he had ever seen. Could it be that He really was the Son of God? This thief was no theologian; and if even Jesus' disciples couldn't understand why their Master was dying a criminal's death, this man *really* must have been baffled. Yet, he couldn't avoid the conviction that Jesus of Nazareth truly is the Son of God. As for himself, he knew full well that he was a condemned sinner, and that the flames of hell were waiting to receive him. And so, in guilt and desperation, he yielded to the conviction of the Holy Spirit, and made the one simple request that resulted in a complete change of his eternal destiny. As we close this morning's message, let's see what this man said to Jesus, and how Jesus replied.

Read Luke 23:39-45.

Conclusion: Folks, salvation really is simple! Jesus didn't leave His heavenly throne, and come down into our world, to save *righteous people*, because none of us is righteous. Christ came down into our world to save *sinners*. Those who will humble themselves, admit that they cannot save themselves, and ask Jesus to save them, will receive pardon and salvation *immediately*. Have *you* humbled yourself, and asked Jesus to save you? If not, please do so today! If you are saved already, I would urge you to remember why Christ died for you, and rose again. He made atonement for you so that you might be freed from the Law, and be governed by a new law—*“the law of the Spirit of life”* in Christ Jesus. Stop trying to serve God in your own strength, and let the Spirit of God do His sanctifying work in you.