

The Wicked at Calvary

Scripture: Matthew 27:27-44

Code: 80-276

I want to encourage you to open your Bible to the twenty-seventh chapter of Matthew and I want to take you back to Calvary tonight to set our thoughts on the suffering of our Savior on our behalf. Back to Matthew chapter 27 and right to the very heart of Matthew's treatment of the cross, starting in verse 27 of chapter 27. And as we read through this narrative and make some comments on it, I want you to focus on one theme tonight, and that is the wickedness of Calvary...the wickedness of Calvary.

Those of us who are familiar, of course, with the execution of Jesus Christ, the murder of Jesus as it truly was, are very much aware of how wickedly He was treated. But this narrative in Matthew allows us to get a little more deeply into this wickedness to do a little bit of a study of the elements of wickedness, perhaps, if you will, the pathology of this wickedness that murdered the living Lord Jesus. And the wicked treatment of Jesus didn't start at the cross. It pursued Him from His birth. It was wickedness that tried to kill Him when He was an infant. It was wickedness that tried to discredit Him in His teaching. It was wickedness that tried to tempt Him and cause Him to fall victim to the wiles of Satan. It was wickedness that tried to destroy Him as a miracle working prophet of God by pushing Him off of a cliff. And finally, it was wickedness that secured His condemnation by death by violating every standard of justice and truth, equity and honor in both Jewish and Gentile law. It was wickedness that betrayed Him. It was wickedness that kissed Him hypocritically. It was wickedness that arrested Him, framed Him, denied Him, slapped Him, punched Him, spit on Him, mocked Him, and finally nailed Him to the cross. Wickedness...profound wickedness as deep as the pit of hell, and temporal wickedness as wretched as the heart of man, it was wickedness. Wickedness fastened Him finally to a cross on four nails, suspending Him in humiliation and torture. And this is the final act of wickedness perpetrated against Jesus in His life, and its greatest work.

And in a sense, I suppose you could say it's the culmination of all the wickedness of human history. For thousands of years wickedness had been growing. It had wrought deeds of impiety and crime that had wrung the ages with agony and often roused the justice of the universe to roll her fiery thunderbolts of retribution through the world. But now wickedness had come to its full maturity. Wickedness is there at the foot of the cross in such gigantic proportions as it has never before been seen. It works in enormity before which the mightiest of its past exploits dwindle...dwindle into insignificance, fades into dimness. It crucifies the living Lord of glory.

And wickedness did not just kill Him. Wickedness tormented Him. He was not allowed to die quickly or easily. He was not even allowed to die just with the agonies of the cross as fierce as they were. No, He had to be lashed and until His last breath, He had to be tormented by His enemies who filled with wickedness endeavored to torture Him with intensity by heartless insulting blasphemies. His sufferings being aggravated by all those around the cross and it seems to be Matthew's particular poignant insight to show us these cruel agonies that surround the agonies of crucifixion because Matthew presents the groups of wicked people who are involved and demonstrates a kind of wickedness that takes many forms. They were all there at the foot of the cross, all the wicked of all kinds.

First of all, there were the ignorant wicked. Those who were wicked, in fact those were the actual executioners of Jesus, the callous Roman soldiers. But their wickedness was best defined as a kind of ignorant wickedness. Verse 27 begins, "Then the soldiers," and there we meet them. "The soldiers of the governor, Pilate, took Jesus into the praetorium and gathered the whole Roman cohort around Him." Pilate had already sinned against the dictates of his own conscience. Pilate had already sinned against conviction, against justice, against truth, against integrity, against character. Pilate was a miserable, heartless, shrinking man who sold out the truth to save his job rather than release Jesus whom he knew was innocent, whom he pronounced innocent repeatedly. He had Him scourged hoping to satiate the blood-thirsty mob with just a scourging. And that didn't do it. And Jesus has endured the scourging and is now brought back inside the praetorium which was under the rule of Pilate and placed in the custody of the Roman soldiers. They are the first group of the wicked who reject Christ. Roman legionnaires they were and Roman legionnaires, for the most part, weren't Romans, that is, they weren't Italians. They were recruited...they were recruited from many, many places. Wherever the Roman Empire extended, they recruited legionnaires. And they used them as occupying soldiers. They very likely were Syrians. They would choose Syrians because Syrians could speak Aramaic, Italians could not. And the Aramaic was spoken by the Jews.

They were not then Romans and they were not Jews. The Jews, we know, were exempted from military service and none but a traitorous Jew would serve an occupying army. And if they were the troops brought by Pilate from Caesarea, they weren't normally stationed in Jerusalem. They may well have had no knowledge of this Jesus, what was going on around Him, or who He was, or who He even claimed to be. What they did, they did in ignorance. They saw Jesus as a strange, pathetic character, A Jew hated by His own people. They saw Him as perhaps mentally deranged. They saw Him as a clown to be mocked and scorned. And since He never said anything, He never spoke in all the circumstances they were involved in, they may well have questioned His intelligence, or even His sanity. And, of course, the indictment against Him was that He was claiming to be a King, if nothing else that would make Him play out as an idiot. And so they treated Him as you would treat an idiot boy in the street. He was a mentally deficient faker, worthy nothing more than to be the butt of their

jokes. So they fully enjoyed Pilate's personal torture in sending Jesus down there when He knew He was innocent. And they joined in the mockery that was coming from the Jews on Jesus and mocked Him themselves. What they did was likely under Pilate's eye as he emerged later with Jesus to face the crowd. And so they took Jesus, it says in verse 27, into the praetorium.

Pilate wanted Him scourged. And then Pilate also wanted to have Him look like a King in jest, like a joker king. And then to bring Jesus out as this ridiculous joker king to show the Jews how stupid it was for them to think of Him as a threat to them or to Rome. And thus he might not have to kill this pathetic innocent man, who would kill such a pitiful claimant to be a king? By the time Pilate had Him whipped, and by the time the soldiers had created the mockery, and they brought out Jesus, surely that would be enough to satiate the crowd. Already bleeding from the scourging which had opened up His flesh to reveal His internal tissue, blood flowing, by now coagulating profusely, agony in every nerve, His whole body quivering in tortuous pain, He became the object of ridicule by this ignorant group of wicked soldiers. And it says in verse 28, they stripped Him and put a scarlet robe on Him. This was a *speira*, it says in verse 27, a cohort of as many as 600 soldiers. We don't know actually how many were there handling Jesus, but they were part of a cohort, could be anywhere from 400 to 600 men. No Jews are there. They stay outside to prevent defilement at the Passover season by stepping into a Gentile area. So the soldiers have Jesus to themselves and their wicked minds.

It isn't that they reject Him as God, or reject Him as Messiah. They have no such knowledge. They treat Him the way rough, hard-nosed men used to death, used to prisoners, used to execution would treat any man. Only maybe they see Him even as a lesser than most. They have no interest in alleviating His agony. They have no concern for His suffering. They have no interest in healing His wounds. They are bent on the fun of aggravating His agony and mocking His foolish claims. Trained they are to torture. Trained they are to kill. Thirsty they are for blood and evil. They express the wickedness of the human heart in the definition that we could call ignorant wickedness. They had no personal reason to dislike Jesus. He had never been in conflict with them. He didn't interrupt their goals or their ideals or their prejudices, or their ambitions. He didn't get in their way. Yet they found great joy in His devastating pain. Their hearts were without kindness and without sympathy. And so they stripped Him. They literally undressed Him.

After the scourging, they stripped Him down and then they put on Him a scarlet robe. Over the exposed, tender, bleeding flesh, they placed a soldier's rough outer coat, the Greek word *chlamus*, rough against the tender wounds. It would have created increased pain. Scarlet, it says here, John says purple. Romans wore scarlet cloaks, that was kind of the color of the Roman soldier's garment. This one, having been in the sun, had faded to purple. John identifies it as purple, a faded scarlet, maybe purple because that was the color of royal robes. They picked one that had faded significantly so that they could carry out the mockery that He had claimed to be a king. If that isn't enough, to add that irritation to His wounds, verse 29 says, "They were weaving a crown of thorns and put it on His

head. Cheap imitation of a royal wreath worn by Caesar, familiar to everybody because such a wreath was on the head of Caesar in his image imprinted on the coinage. They put a reed in His hand as a mock scepter and they began to kneel down before Him and mock Him saying, "Hail, King of the Jews." Sarcasm and ridicule intended to humiliate. And if that isn't enough, in verse 30 they spat on Him. This is the ultimate indignity, the most severe sign of disgust that can ever be given, I suppose, in almost every society, to spit on someone. This is nothing but a fool to spit on.

They have no idea of who He claimed to be. They have no idea what His message is. And then to continue the mockery and the scorn, they took the reed and began to beat Him on the head repeatedly, brutal amusement to show that any idea of this fool being a king was absolutely a joke. Pilate, by the way, finally stopped the fun and took Jesus out before the people, hoping that they would say, "That's enough." Hoping that they would look and say, "There's no way that a man like that could ever be taken seriously as a threat to us or to Rome." But when Pilate took Him out, according to the nineteenth chapter of John, the people just screamed for His blood. Verse 31, after they had mocked Him, and after the scene before the crowd who screamed for His execution, He came back in. The soldiers took His robe off, put His garments on Him and led Him away to crucify Him. The procession begins.

And as they were coming out, verse 32 says, out of the Praetorium to go up the way of the cross to the hill of Golgotha, they found a man of Cyrene named Simon whom they pressed into service to bear His cross. Executions, by the way, were always done outside the city, outside the city gates so the procession of humiliation went through the main streets of Jerusalem with a sign in front of the procession, or perhaps around the neck of the victim. A sign, of course we know what the sign said, "This is Jesus, the king of the Jews." The sign was intended to contain the indictment against Him, and that was the indictment for which He was to be executed, that He claimed to be the King of the Jews. Execution also, by the way, was not only always done outside the city, but always done on a main highway. It was done on a main highway so the rotting flesh of the corpse could be seen and people could be warned as to what it means to violate Rome. Israel's roads were lined with as many as 30,000 crucified people during this period of time, agonizing testimony to the severity of punishment against crimes perpetrated on the Roman power.

Along the way they found a man of Cyrene named Simon who has become famous in history. Cyrene is an old Greek settlement in what is modern Lybia, North Africa, along the coast west of Alexandria, Egypt. This was a man of Cyrene named Simon. Simon is a Jewish name, a Jewish man from North Africa who had come to the city of Jerusalem for the Passover. There was a large settlement of Jews there. In fact, on the Day of Pentecost when the Apostles and the Christians, the 120, were given the ability to speak the wonderful works of God in many languages, there were people gathered, it says in Acts 2, from Cyrene. And so, Simon provides some relief by carrying either the whole cross or the crosspiece, pressed into service to bear the cross of Jesus. Verse 33,

"When they had come to a place called Golgotha, which means place of a skull." Golgotha is an Aramaic word. The New Testament is written in Greek because it was inspired by God and they penned it in Greek, but the conversational language of the New Testament age was Aramaic in Israel. And this is the Aramaic word for skull. We talk about Calvary because Calvary is the Latin word for skull. They were headed to Skull Hill, a hill identified as Skull Hill probably because it looked like a skull. And they took Him there. And when they got Him there, verse 34 says, "They gave Him wine to drink, mingled with gall." Gall was a narcotic and gall was used to bring about a certain kind of restfulness on the victim of crucifixion. You say, "Was it for mercy?" No. It wasn't for mercy. It wasn't to alleviate pain. It wasn't to minimize pain. It wasn't to diminish suffering. It was for one reason, they gave it to the victim before they crucified him so that they could crucify him. Because any...any power left in the person would cause him to fight, to prevent what was happening from happening. And in order to be...in order to be able to lay that victim down and drive those nails through his hands and feet, they had to put him in some kind of a more tranquil condition. And it says there, "After tasting it, He was unwilling to drink, He spit it out."

He would bear the pain. He would not resist. It was not only by the wickedness of men, but Acts 2 says, "By the determinant counsel and foreknowledge of God that He was crucified." He was going as a lamb to slaughter. He was going willingly to die for our sins and the sins of all who would ever believe. They didn't have to fight Him to nail Him there. He didn't need any calming agent because no one took His life from Him, He laid it down of His own will in obedience to His Father and for our redemption. And so verse 35 says, "And when they had crucified Him..." We have to stop there for just a moment.

It doesn't even describe the crucifixion. It doesn't tell us about the nails tearing through His hands and feet. It just says, "When they had crucified Him." It was nine o'clock on that Friday morning. It was routine for them. They had done it hundreds of times. And there was a little ritual that they went through. They divided up His garments among themselves, casting lots. This is prophesied in Psalm 22 verse 18. Every Jew had five articles of clothing...shoes, a head covering, a belt, or sash, an inner garment, and an outer cloak. And those would be equally divided. And there must have been four of them, I suppose, in this crucifixion operation. Somebody got the shoes, somebody got the head covering, somebody else got the belt, somebody else got the outer cloak. But there was that inner cloak and it was seamless, so they gambled for it, casting lots to see who got the extra garment. And verse 36 is really the sort of definitive look at the ignorant, wicked, "Sitting down they began to keep watch over Him there."

What a statement. They just sat there, utterly indifferent to who he was, utterly unmoved. They watched the fool they had mocked with cruelty and morbid sensation. They were just making sure that nobody came to take Him off the cross. And verse 37 says, "They put up above His head the charge against Him which read, 'This is Jesus, the king of the Jews.'" This was cynicism at its best,

sarcasm for sure. Sarcasm directed back at the Jews. This was Pilate, and when they said, "We don't want that up there," Pilate said, "Whatever I've written, I've written, I'm not changing it." It was a blast at the Jews who had blackmailed Pilate to kill an innocent man and so Pilate identified Him as their king. They wanted him to put up, "He said he was the king," Pilate said, I'm not going to change it." There we meet the ignorant wicked.

Guilty of crucifying the Son of God? Yes, but ignorant. There are many like them today who reject Jesus Christ out of ignorance, a culpable ignorance, an ignorance for which God which God will hold them accountable. For had they had hearts opened to the truth, they could have known, they couldn't have known, they could have known.

The second group of wicked are not the ignorant wicked, but the knowing wicked, illustrated not by the callous soldiers, but by the crass robbers. Look at verse 38. "At that time two robbers were crucified with Him, one on the right, and one on the left." Here we meet two more who fall into the category of wicked, but they're different. They're identified here as robbers. And the word used to describe them, robbers, is the word *Iesti* which isn't simply a word for robbery, it's a word for bandit, *klepti* from which we get kleptomaniac is a word for thief. But these are really bandits. These are plunderers. They may well have worked with Barabbas since Barabbas was on the dock to be the one on that cross, not Jesus, and Pilate wanting to force the people to let Jesus go thought if he offered them Barabbas and his two cohorts, who were plundering bandits, they would certainly want to have Barabbas and his henchmen out of their lives because they had done so much deadly damage. So it's very likely that these two were somehow associated with the kind of crimes, if not the very crimes, of which Barabbas was guilty.

So on one side and the other side of Jesus are these two plundering bandits. And verse 44 says, "And the robbers...dropping down to verse 44...also who had been crucified with Him were casting the same insult at Him." It was a mockery event. It was a cynicism and sarcasm and scorn and blasphemy event. These were secular Jews who lived for the loot without thought of what was right or what was moral or what was good or what was noble. They would just as soon steal and kill from their people as look at them. They knew about Jesus. They were Jews. They wouldn't know the buzz about Jesus in their own country. They don't care about Jesus. They don't care about the Kingdom of God. They care about the money. They don't care about truths. They don't care about right and righteousness. They care about self-indulgence. They know about Jesus because it says in verse 44 that they were casting the same insult at Him that is in verse 42 and 43, He saved others, He can't save Himself...ha-ha...He claims to be the Savior of the world...He claims to be the Savior of sinners...He can't even save Himself...He claims to be the King of Israel...then let Him come down from the cross...He says He trusts in God, let God deliver Him. He said, "I am the Son of God, let God show that He is. So they repeat the same insults. They know what they are. They know Jesus made claims to be the Savior, to be the King, to call men to believe in Him. They know He said that He was the Son of God. And they throw those same claims in a mocking fashion right back in the

face of Jesus.

They're worse than the soldiers. The soldiers were ignorant, they're not. They know the truth. But they're not interested in the truth. The soldiers mocked Jesus out of ignorance. They mocked Jesus with knowledge. They are materialists, caring nothing for spiritual matters.

And then there's a third group of wicked that appear in the scene, I guess we could call them the fickle wicked. They're not the ignorant wicked and they're not just the knowing wicked. They're the fickle. They're not the callous soldiers and they're not the crass robbers, they're really the careless passers-by, I guess. Look at verse 39, back up to 39, "And those passing by," they're just people milling along, going down the road and what are they doing? Hurling abuse at Him, wagging their heads and saying, "You who are going to destroy the temple and built it in three days, save yourself if you're the Son of God, come down from the cross." Down the road they go with but a glance at another crucified man. They have seen hundreds, if not thousands of them. They are a fickle group, these passers by because you remember, it was Monday of that week when Jesus came into Jerusalem and they had hailed Him as Son of David, they had hailed Him as Messiah at His triumphal entry, what we call Palm Sunday really was a Palm Monday.

Now it's life back to normal, a week or nearly a week, five days have passed since then. Life has gone back to the usual. Jesus hasn't done anything with His opportunity, they were ready to name Him king, they were ready to hail Him as Messiah. What did He do with it? Now look at Him. Certainly this was not the Messiah they hoped He would be. There's no miracle here. There He is, the laughing stock. The clown, the fool, and they joined the mockery. They too were hurling abuse at Him. Well they had already screamed for His blood, already demanded that He be executed from early that same morning. Now this dying, unrecognizable mass of bloody flesh executed by the very Romans they hoped He would overthrow. They were wrong on Monday, they concluded, this isn't the Messiah, kill Him. They had heard Him teach, seen His miracles, knew He raised Lazarus from the dead, but now they're hurling abuse at Him...imperfect tense, they were blaspheming Him continuously. Jesus didn't give them what they wanted when they wanted it, how they wanted it. They wanted freedom from Rome. They wanted prosperity, not forgiveness and not the salvation of their souls. Their souls were fine and so they add to the abuse being hurled at Jesus by the soldiers and the robbers, and it says wagging their heads. That's also a fulfillment, by the way, of Psalm 22. That's just a sign of mockery and scorn, just a way to show your abusive attitude. And they remembered that He had claimed to be able to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days and that He was speaking of the temple of His body. And they were mockingly saying to Him, "Oh, so you're the one who can save yourself. Really? Then let's see you do it. You're the one who is able to rebuild the temple and you can't even get off that cross?"

This is the fickle crowd. Boy, there are so many people like them even now, passers by who know about Jesus, at some time they identify with Him, but soon they blaspheme Him. They have heard they're better than the ignorant, they're better, I guess, in a sense than the robbers. They have a more complete knowledge. But they've all come to the point where they've said, "Yeah, you're Him, you're the Lord, you're the Messiah." But they turn against Him.

There's one last group of wicked people that appear in this amazing scene. They are the religious wicked. And they are the worst of all, illustrated by the corrupt leaders. Verse 41, "In the same way, in the same way that the soldiers had mocked Him, the robbers had mocked Him, the passers by had mocked Him, "In the same way the chief priests also along with the scribes and elders were mocking Him and saying, 'He saved others, He cannot save Himself, He is the king of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross and we shall believe in Him. He trusts in God, let Him deliver Him now if He takes pleasure in Him, for He said, I am the Son of God.'" And the mockery reaches its pinnacle in these religious wicked.

So, I say there was the torturous, physical suffering of crucifixion, but added to that was the horrendous blasphemy, mockery, scorn and ridicule coming out of the mouths of these wicked people, running on a spectrum all the way from ignorant wickedness to the religious wickedness of those who knew all the messianic prophecies backward and forward and had no reason to conclude that this was any other than the Messiah. But in their wretchedness they too blasphemed, chief priests, scribes, elders...that made up the Sanhedrin, the ruling body of Israel. They were the experts in the Old Testament. They were the ones that knew every Old Testament promise and every Old Testament prophecy. They had all the truth at their disposal and they knew everything Jesus taught, everything He said, everything He was, everything He did, every miracle. They knew He raised the dead. They knew He raised Lazarus from the dead. They knew it. There was no argument. It's common knowledge.

And they didn't talk to Him like the passing crowd did. The passing crowd were hurling abuse sort of at Him. They talked about Him, not to Him. "You, who are going to destroy the temple," that's one thing, that's talking right to Him. The crowd did that. But they talked about Him. "He saved others. He cannot save Himself." They spread their mockery and their abuse among the others.

And so, this is how Jesus is treated. And I think it's the same today. You have the ignorant people who reject Him. You have the knowledgeable people who reject Him. You have the fickle people who affirm Him for some time or superficially and then turn against Him becoming blasphemous apostates. And then you have the religious wicked who scholastically, theologically, interpretively reject the true Jesus of Scripture. It's like I said to that Catholic priest that night on the Larry King program. I said, "You keep talking about YOUR Jesus, there's only one Jesus and that's the Jesus of the Scripture." You can't invent your own Jesus. You're no different than the Sanhedrin,

blaspheming the true Jesus.

So it was that He endured this wickedness. And He endures it to this very day, the callous, the crass, the careless and they hypocritical, the corrupt leadership. He endures it all. He endures it all. But you remember, hanging on the cross He said, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." And a Roman centurion was saved, right? He rescued one from among the callous soldiers. And a thief was saved, right? He rescued one from the crass robbers. And some in that crowd were saved, by the time you get to Pentecost, thousands of them bowed the knee to Christ. And Acts 6:7 says, "Some among the priests were saved." And so the very fact of the grace of God is on display as the Lord reached in to that very crowd that day and redeemed some from each category of wickedness, and He's still doing it today...still. He is the friend of sinners. And we are here to give testimony to that, are we not? We come to this table from among these wicked people. Some of us come from the ignorant world. Some of us come from a knowledgeable past, having known the gospel and finally having believed. Some of us come from a fickle approach to Christ in the past and now we've made a full embrace of who He is. Some of us come out of false religion to the truth. And we're here to celebrate the cross where Jesus on our behalf said, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do."

Father, as we think about this suffering of Your dear Son and our Savior, our hearts are filled with gratitude. We're not worthy of such grace whatever category or combination of categories might be a part of our background, our history. We thank You that Your heart cries out, "Father, forgive them, they don't know what they do." We don't understand the horror of ignorant wickedness, or knowledgeable wickedness or fickle wickedness or religious wickedness. We don't understand what we do when we fall into those patterns and so You rescue us by grace. Some of us come right out of the worst kind of wretched ignorance. Some of us come out of a knowledge of the truth. Some of us come out of a background where we have tampered with the cross in the past and come and gone to and fro whether to commit to Christ or not. And some of us come from religions that would damn us. And we've all come to the foot of the cross and the wicked have been made pure through this sacrifice and Your grace. And so we come to thank You in this way which You have prescribed for us by remembering the Savior's body and blood given for us.

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