

The Meaning of the Cross

Matthew 27:11-26

Matthew 27:11-26 (NASB)

¹¹ “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.*”

¹² And while He was being accused by the chief priests and elders, He did not answer.

¹³ Then Pilate *said to Him, “Do You not hear how many things they testify against You?”

¹⁴ And He did not answer him with regard to even a *single* charge, so the governor was quite amazed.

¹⁵ Now at *the* feast the governor was accustomed to release for the people *any* one prisoner whom they wanted.

¹⁶ At that time they were holding a notorious prisoner, called Barabbas.

¹⁷ 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?”

¹⁸ For he knew that because of envy they had handed Him over.

¹⁹ 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.”

²⁰ But the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowds to ask for Barabbas and to put Jesus to death.

²¹ But the governor said to them, “Which of the two do you want me to release for you?” And they said, “Barabbas.”

²² Pilate *said to them, “Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?” They all *said, “Crucify Him!”

²³ And he said, “Why, what evil has He done?” But they kept shouting all the more, saying, “Crucify Him!”

²⁴ 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.”

²⁵ And all the people said, “His blood shall be on us and on our children!”

²⁶ Then he released Barabbas for them; but after having Jesus scourged, he handed Him over to be crucified.”

The cross—the symbol of Christianity—has great meaning to God.

First of all, through Jesus’ death, the Father proclaimed the value of every single human being: He offers forgiveness and eternal life to anyone who places faith in Jesus ([Romans 6:23](#)).

[Romans 6:23 \(NASB\)](#)

²³ “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Second, it meant a great cost. Holy God separated Himself from His beloved Son while Jesus bore the weight of mankind's sin. (See [Matthew 27:46](#).)

[Matthew 27:46 \(NASB\)](#)

⁴⁶“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?”

Third, the redemption of man was accomplished. Jesus' shed blood purchased us from slavery to sin and reconciled us to God ([1 Peter 1:18-19](#)).

[1 Peter 1:18-19 \(NASB\)](#)

¹⁸“Knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers,
¹⁹but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, *the blood of Christ.*”

What's more, divine justice was carried out on the cross. Scripture tells us that death is the debt owed for sin ([Ezekiel 18:20](#)).

[Ezekiel 18:20 \(NASB\)](#)

²⁰“The person who sins will die. The son will not bear the punishment for the father's iniquity, nor will the father bear the punishment for the son's iniquity; the righteousness of the righteous will be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked will be upon himself.”

However, God requires an unblemished sacrifice ([Deuteronomy 17:1](#)).

[Deuteronomy 17:1 \(NASB\)](#)

¹“You shall not sacrifice to the LORD your God an ox or a sheep which has a blemish or any defect, for that is a detestable thing to the LORD your God.”

We could not adequately pay our own penalty because we would only die in our sin. For holy God to forgive us, a sufficient substitute had to be found—one who qualified to pay for our disobedience. Jesus, the only one who was without sin, willingly took our place and assumed responsibility for our debt. All our iniquity—past, present, and future—was placed on Christ, and God's judgment upon us was carried out against Him.

The meaning of the cross was experienced firsthand by Barabbas, the notorious prisoner who was condemned to die. God's innocent Son was substituted for him, giving the criminal freedom. Like Barabbas, we've had our death sentence commuted, and, though unworthy, we have been set free in Jesus. Today, the cross continues to offer life and freedom to the undeserving.