

Palm Sunday (Passion Sunday): Matthew 27:33-50: The Crucifixion

1. The Gospel for this Sunday is Mt. 21:1-11, the same as the Lesson for Advent I. The Lesson for this Sunday is Mt. 26:1-27:66 (long) and Mt. 27:11-54 (short), both impossible for texts, simply because of length. Therefore these notes are devoted to Mt. 27:33-50, the Crucifixion. The preacher has a choice between Mt. 21:1-11 which is devoted to Palm Sunday and Mt. 27:33-50 which is devoted to Passion Sunday.
2. Vs. 33: The subject implicit in ἐλθόντες is the soldiers, going back to vs. 27. The words ὁ ἔστιν Κρανίου Τόπος are parenthetical, added by the Evangelist, a translation of Golgatha. RSV, NIV, NEB put these words in parentheses. Bengel: "The hill was called so from its shape."
3. Vs. 34: ἔδωκον here and ἐπότιζεν, vs. 48, are the only verbs in this text which denote something which was given to Jesus, both referring to a drink. πειν denotes purpose. "Wine mixed with gall" is equivalent to Mk. 15:23 "myrrhed wine". It was a bitter drink whose purpose was to stupefy. οὐκ ἠθέλησεν πειν is a litotes "He refused to drink" not because of its taste but because of its intended effect. γευσόμενος is simply temporal. Its purpose was to make the victim of crucifixion docile and manageable. Hendriksen: "Jesus refused to drink it, no doubt because he wanted to endure with full consciousness all the pain that was in store for him." Furthermore, a man who has been drugged cannot speak clearly. From the four Gospels we know that Jesus spoke seven times. Only one is listed by Matthew. But, obviously, He wanted to be heard clearly. The humanity of Jesus clearly shows through.
4. Vs. 35: Forms of σταυρῶ are found 10 times in Matthew, 8 in Mark, 5 in Luke, and 10 in John, for a total of 33. In the remainder of the NT we have a total of 11, mostly in Paul's Epistles. In other words, from Gospels to the remainder of the NT its frequency is 3 to 1. The Gospels dwell on the fact, but elsewhere the Apostles dwell on its significance and fruits. In vs. 35 σταυρώσαντες is temporal "after they crucified Him." The Gospels do not dwell on the details of the crucifixion of Jesus. They dwell on the circumstances attending the crucifixion. These circumstances make this crucifixion unique. Note the reference to Ps. 69:22 in the margin of Nestle for vs. 34 and to Ps. 22:19 for vs. 35. By the way, Pss. 22 and 69 and Is. 53 ought to be read in English in their entirety in preparation for this text. All was foretold with precision. βάλλοντες denotes means. Bengel remarks: "When the very poorest man dies, he has at least some covering on his body; Jesus had none. Not even are His garments given to His friends and relatives, but to the soldiers." Lenski: "None of the older writers mention a loincloth. . . . The clothes of the victim were the perquisites of the executioners, the victim being regarded as one who was already dead." Jesus had nothing except a cross. Note the addition to the text in the apparatus, taken from Jn. 19:24, found in the AV and the NKJV, not in the remainder of our translations.
5. Vs. 36: The subject is still the soldiers. Note that the participle is present tense, the verb imperfect, both denoting continued action, throughout the crucifixion. Whether they be translated coordinately or subordinately, makes little difference. (Cf. translations). Two things ought to be noted: 1) They were simply doing their job, carrying out orders, and 2) As Hendriksen notes "This act of keeping Jesus under strict surveillance is significant. Does it not bear witness to the fact that Jesus really died on Calvary?" In other words, heathen soldiers were witnesses to what happened.
6. Vs. 37: At Jn. 19:19 it is called a title. At Mk. 15:26 and Lk. 23:38 it is called a superscription. But here it is called an αἵρεσις, "a charge" or "indictment". RSV, JB and NASB read "the charge against Him". AAT: "a notice stating why He was being punished." γεγραμμένην, in written form so that

all could read it. John gives the details about this superscription. Lenski: "Matthew calls it the ἀίτια, the charge or 'indictment' against Jesus. The crime committed by Jesus, then, was the fact that he was 'the King of the Jews'. . . . By adding nothing further Pilate really proclaims the innocence of Jesus even here on the cross. . . . This accusation was at the same time a vindication." Hendriksen: "It could be read as an accusation 'This is Jesus, who was crucified because he claimed to be King of the Jews.' The Jewish leaders desired to have the ambiguity removed. For reasons of his own Pilate refused."

7. Vs. 38: Vss. 27-37 are devoted wholly to what the soldiers did to Jesus. Vss. 38-44 begin and end with the two robbers and obviously describe the reviling by three different groups during the hours of 9-12 a.m. *σπαρσοῦντο* is present passive. Bengel: "Matthew and Mark mention the crucifixion of the two robbers at a later point of time than the other two Evangelists; from which we may infer that the crucifixion of Jesus was regarded by Pilate and his subordinates as the principal and most important case." Cf. Is. 53:12. Lenski: "Why these two robbers were ordered to be crucified with Jesus we do not know. But we surmise that it was done in order to insult the Jews and to degrade their king even in his crucifixion. The two robbers were to cast shame on Jesus and thus on the Jews." We add that, according to Luke, one repented, the other did not. In the providence of God the two robbers were crucified with Jesus to show the wonders of conversion in the hour of death and the awfulness of rejection of Jesus in the hour of utmost need. Note that in the Greek text vs. 38 is more a subparagraph than is vs. 39. Vss. 39-44 describe three groups of revilers, which include the robbers.
8. Vs. 39: Vss. 39-40 denote a general group, vss. 41-43 are more specific and vs. 44 is devoted to the robbers. We agree with Lenski who says that "those passing by" were Jews of the city who repeat the very things said during the night session of the Sanhedrin (26:61 and 26:63-66). *ἐβλασφήμουν* is imperfect of continued and repeated action. It denotes defiant irreverence. The translations are interesting. Only NKJV has "blasphemed". AV "reviled" LB, NEB and NASB "were hurling abuse" RSV "derided" TEV and NIV "hurled insults" and JB "jeered". The participles *κινούντες* and *λέγοντες* denote manner or means, both in the present tense denoting constant action. Their insults came out in their actions and words. "Wagging the head" evidently denotes arrogance and disapproval.
9. Vs. 40: If *καὶ* (before *κατάρβηθι*) be read, we have one sentence. Thus AAT: "You tear down the temple and build it in three days--save Yourself, if You are God's Son, and come down from the cross." If *καὶ* be omitted (likely the better reading) we have two sentences. Thus AV and NKJV: "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." These notes prefer the translation of AV and NKJV because it brings out clearly two charges. Bengel says: "Seven scoffs of His enemies may be counted." Here we have the first two: a) The first goes back to Jn. 2:19. When Jesus cleansed the temple the first time, the Jews asked for a sign to prove that He had this authority. His enigmatic saying dwells on His death and resurrection. Though they would destroy Him, He would raise Himself. He was speaking about the temple of His body, not the Temple in Jerusalem. Lenski: "What Jesus had said was that, if the Jews continued their course of rejecting the Messiah, God's true Sanctuary among his people, they would thus destroy their own Sanctuary, this symbol of the Messiah, which, of course, could not remain after the Messiah had been rejected. Then, Jesus said, he would raise up the Sanctuary, the true one, himself, from the death in the tomb, that death by which the Jews destroyed their own Sanctuary, yea, their own nation." The Jews did not forget what Jesus had said. Three years later it was brought up as a charge against Jesus before Caiaphas. See 26:61. On the phrase "in three days" Bengel says: "Yea, it was already now the first of them." In vs. 40 the Jews are saying: "Anyone who can make

such a claim must be able to save Himself." Mockery! b) The second goes back to Mt. 26:63-66. It also reminds one of what Satan said at Mt. 4:3. Satan didn't believe it and it made the Jews furious. They say: "Prove that you are God's Son by coming down from the cross." These are words of unbelief and rejection. Jesus came not to be served but to serve, to give His life as ransom for many. (Mt. 20:28). He proved that He was the Son of God by staying on the cross. Cf. Jn. 17:1. Bengel says: "We Christians believe on Him for that very reason, that He did not immediately descend from the cross, but on the contrary consummated His work." Unbelief is always saying the opposite of what faith clings to. Note that in this vs. a form of σωζω occurs for the first time. There will be three more: 2 in 42 and 1 in 49. They can't forget the word "save" which Jesus used many times for their good. They use it in derision.

10. Vs. 41: ὁμοίως "in the same way". Bengel: "Now the chief men imitate the populace. But they surpass them in bitterness." Lenksi: "Like the common herd, they give way to their basest passions." Hendriksen: "These chief priests, scribes, and elders lose every bit of dignity, and join the bypassers in giving expression to their contempt of Jesus." He adds: "The bypassers had addressed Jesus directly, using the second person singular. But not once in the narrative of Christ's crucifixion---whether in Matthew, Mark, or Luke---do the leaders address Jesus directly. Each time they talk about him, to each other. They never talk to him. So thoroughly do they hate him." ἔλεγον is impf. of continued and repeated action.
11. Vs. 42: Now the third of the seven scoffs: "Other He saved, Himself He cannot save." If they had believed the first part, they would never have said the second. They are saying: "He is a total phony." Now the fourth scoff, literally: "King of Israel is He". The translations are interesting. RSV, NIV, JB, AAT and NASB: "He is the King of Israel." AV and NKJV: "If he be the King of Israel." LB: "So you are the King of Israel, are you?" TEV: "Isn't he the King of Israel?" NEB: "King of Israel, indeed!" The first translation states Jesus' claim; the second makes it conditional, that which they don't believe; LB, TEV and NEB bring out the element of scorn. Then follows: "Let Him come down right now from the cross and we will believe on Him." In vs. 40 the passerby had said only "Let Him come down from the cross." The Jewish leaders add "right now" and the promise that they would believe. Even if He had, they wouldn't have believed. He healed the blind man (Jn. 9) but they would not believe. He raised Lazarus (Jn. 11) but they would not believe. Look at Lk. 16:31. Their root problem was impenitence. Their derision and unbelief caused them to lie. There was no truth in them. Read Jn. 8:44-45. Also I Jn. 1:8.
12. Vs. 43: Now the fifth scoff. By the way, Matthew cites two passages from prophecy (Ps. 69:22 in vs. 34 and Ps. 22:19 in vs. 35) to show what men would do to Jesus on the cross and two passages from prophecy (Ps. 22:9 in 43 and Ps. 22:2 in 46) to show what would be said. The first from the mouth of the deriding leaders, the second from Jesus. One thousand years before it happened, David wrote what they would say! Remarkable. "He has confidence in His God; let (God) save Him now, if He (really) wants Him." They were telling God to bring Jesus down from the cross right now, IF He really wanted Him. Note that εἰ θέλει αὐτόν is the protasis of a fact or particular condition. They are practically saying to God: "Do you or don't you want Him?" What had the Father said about His Son? Read Mt. 3:17 and 17:5. γάρ is explanatory. Lenski thinks this is a parenthesis, added by the Evangelist. None of our translations makes it parenthetical nor do we think it is such. These are the words of the deriders: "You see, He said 'I'm God's Son'." Note that neither θεοῦ nor υἱός is articular. AV, RSV, NIV, JB and NKJV translate: "For he said I am the Son of God." The others have "God's Son". No translation takes it as "a son of God". Read Mt. 26:63-66 again. Caiaphas said: "The Christ, the Son of God" all with articles. At Mt. 4:3 Satan, and at Mt. 27:40 and 43 His deriders, drop the article before υἱός but clearly, in all cases, they say "God's Son". That He

claimed to be very God of very God made them utterly furious. Let no one tell you otherwise. Before we go on, note the verbs in 39-44: βλασφημέω in 39, ἐμπαίζοντες in 41 and ὄνειδίζω in 44. All violent verbs and their tenses denote repeated and continued action. These weren't casual remarks or slips of the tongue. They came from malicious hearts. Read Lk. 22:53. All hell had been turned loose on Jesus.

13. Vs. 44: τὸ αὐτὸ "the same thing". καὶ "even" something which would not have been expected. They had evidently not been at the trial but in their despair and pain joined in the fun-making. On this vs. cf. I Pet. 2:22-24. Matthew does not tell us about the conversion of one of the robbers, as does Luke.
14. Vss. 45-50 comprise the final section of this pericope. It tells us what happened from noon til 3 pm. The darkness was caused by an eclipse of the sun, Lk. 23:44-45. Note πᾶσαν, "all". Does γῆν mean Palestine or the whole earth? Only LB translates "the whole earth". All the rest have either "all the land" or "the whole country". Bengel and Lenski are convinced that it means "the whole earth". Mark has ὅλην τὴν γῆν, likewise Luke. John does not mention it. Cf. the attendant wonders at Mt. 27:51-53. It must mean "the whole earth", despite the fact that other cultures did not record this eclipse. It was not an ordinary eclipse but truly a judgment of God on the sin of man.
15. Vs. 46: Silence during the three hours. It must have been awesome. Jesus says nothing. Read Gal. 3:13; II Cor. 5:21; Is. 53:6. Jesus was cursed. He was made sin. The Lord punished Him. And, in each case, "in our stead". During these three hours the Father abhorred His own Son, turned from Him, the sin-bearer. At the end, and only at the end, of these three hours, Jesus cries out with a loud voice. Read Ps. 22:1-5. God had heard the fathers but during these three hours did not hear Jesus. Matthew interprets what Jesus said in Hebrew and Aramaic. He doesn't say "My Father" as always before, but "My God, My God." It shows how deserted Jesus truly was. And yet He says "MY-MY". If ever the preacher must understand what is meant by a genitive of relationship, here it is. Jesus clings to God despite all. Why does Jesus say "Why"? Bengel: "Jesus knew the cause, and had prepared Himself for all things; but yet the 'why' expressed that the Son would not have had to endure the abandonment on His own account, but that it happened to Him for a new cause, and would last but for a short time; after which His yearning desire towards the Father would be again gratified." On the words "hast Thou forsaken Me" he says: "Note the past tense. At that very instant the abandonment came to an end, and shortly afterwards the whole Passion. In the midst and deepest moment of abandonment He was silent. He complains of the abandonment only." The point that Bengel is making is that Jesus suffered the penalty of my sin without one complaint as is stated clearly at Hebr. 10:5-10. Lenski says: "In the garden Jesus has a God who hears and strengthens him; on the cross this God has turned wholly away from him. During those three black hours Jesus was made sin for us, was made a curse for us, and thus God turned completely away from him. In the garden Jesus wrestles with himself and brought himself to do the Father's will; on the cross he wrestles with God and simply endures. With his dying powers he cries to God and now no longer sees in him the Father, for a wall of separation has risen between the Father and the Son, namely the world's sin and its curse as they lie upon the Son. Jesus thirsts for God, but God has removed himself. It is not the Son that has left the Father, but the Father the Son. . . . The nearest we can hope to come toward penetrating this mystery is to think of Jesus as being covered with the world's sin and curse and that, when God saw Jesus thus, he turned away from him." An awesome mystery but THE article of faith.
16. Vs. 47: Here comes the sixth scoff. ἔλεγον, continued and repeated action. If Jesus had been calling Elijah, the form would have been Elijahu. These men did not misunderstand. They are scoffing. The intense darkness of three hours duration was a judgment of God on man's sin. But this judgment did not affect these men. They still scoff. Only the Word of God can convert.

17. Vs. 48: Note εὐθέως "immediately". Just as the conversion of the one malefactor in the Gospel of Luke is a note of relief, so what this one man did is a note of relief. Read Jn. 19:28-29 at this point. Matthew seems to indicate, as does Mk. 15:36, that this one man did not join in the jeering. But we can't prove it. Does Mk. 9:41 pertain here? We know not. Did he become a Christian? We know not. In any case, it is the sole merciful touch in vss. 27-50.
18. Vs. 49: "But the rest" other than the one man. Here comes the seventh scoff. On *Αφεξ Bengel remarks: "By 'let be' they mean that the aid of their companion who offered vinegar is unnecessary." In other words "Don't give Him a drink." Thus all our translations, evidently, except NEB and NASB (and Lenski): "Let us see if Elijah will come etc." We think that they are asking the one man to desist from giving Jesus a drink. But, prophecy was fulfilled. Ps. 69:22. σώσων the future participle to denote purpose. What a perversion of the Truth, the final jab.
19. Vs. 50: But Jesus' sorrows were past now. Note πάλιν "again". He cried twice with a loud voice. The four Gospels do not say "Jesus died". Of course they killed Him. Cf. Mt. 17:23 and Acts 3:15. But Mt. 27:50 says the same as does Jn. 10:18. He laid down His life willingly. It was with a "loud cry". Usually people die bereft of all strength. He gave up His spirit. Thus NIV and AAT. We think Lenski is too abstruse in attempting to distinguish ψυχή and πνεῦμα. TEV and NEB have "breathed his last" but it is stronger than that. Gal. 2:20b says it beautifully.