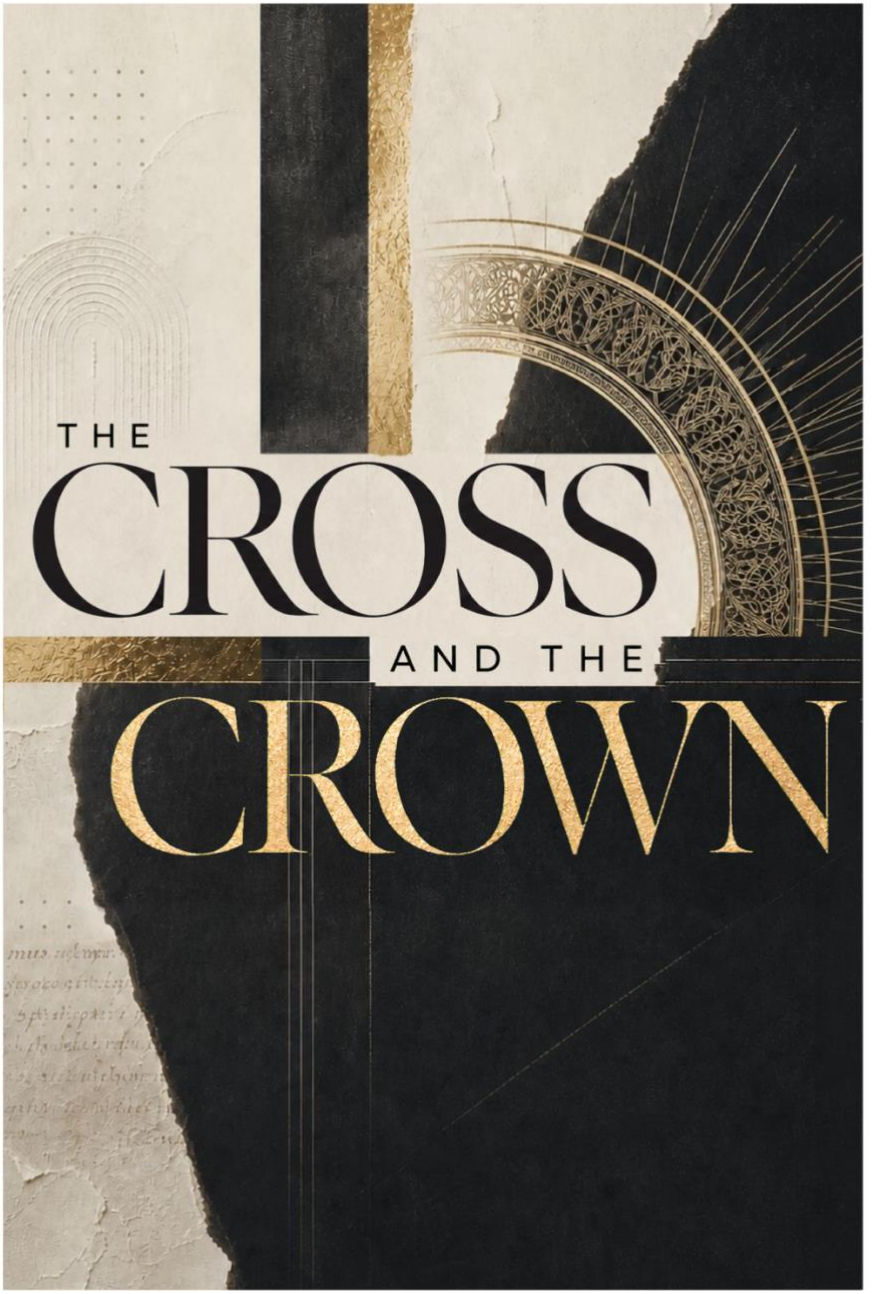
WORD TO LIFE // WEEKLY DEVOTIONAL




MATTHEW 27:1-56

WEEKS 13-16



**Word to Life** studies are sermon-aligned study guides, created to help the church dive even deeper into the passages we study together on Sundays.

Each week there will be five studies to help you prepare for the upcoming weekend sermon. This will also be a great discussion tool at your next LifeGroup meeting.

We hope you enjoy and grow deeper in your faith!

**CONTRIBUTORS**

Brayden Jones, Olivia D'Souza, Courtney Cobbs, Beth Jones, Jay Lee, Cohen Raney, Roxanne Lee, Lesley Butcher, Sarah Wilson, Chris D'Souza, John Stone, Brent Wilson, Maggie Dawson.

WORD TO LIFE

# WEEK 13

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**Week 13: Matthew 27:1-10**

**Day 1: A Day to Explore**
**READ: Matthew 27:1-10**

*Instructions*: Spend time reading Matthew 27:1-10 and complete the activities and questions below.

**Activity:** While reading, include some observations in the space below.

**Question:** What do you think about the fact that Jesus spent the rest of the night held captive by those who sought to kill him the next day?

**Question:** Why do you think the chief priests and elders took Jesus to Pilate instead of just killing Him themselves?

**Question:** Why do you think Judas had such a change of heart only after knowing that Jesus was to be condemned?

**Question:** Do you think that Judas potentially expected some other outcome for Jesus? Do you think it was possible that he expected Jesus to be made an earthly king?

**Question:** Why do you think the chief priests and elders were morally opposed to taking the money back, knowing they had given the money in the first place?

**Question:** What do you think would be unique about a field owned by a potter?

**Question:** How much do you think Judas is morally culpable for his actions if they were used to fulfill prophecy?

**Activity:** Read Jeremiah Chapters 18 and 19. Record observations on how they might be related to the passage in Matthew.

**Week 13: Matthew 27:1-10**

**Day 2: Examine Your Heart**

**READ: Matthew 27:1-10; 2 Corinthians 7:10**

**EXPLORE:**

When I (Olivia) was younger, I would frequently get in trouble and would require some form of discipline from my parents. My dad would talk to me about whatever it was I did and then would usually end by telling me, "Olivia, you need to examine your heart." He would then leave me in my room to think about what I had done, but instead it usually resulted in me wondering what he meant by "examine my heart" when he hadn't explained how I was supposed to do that! As I grew up, I realized he meant I needed to repent at a heart level and fully turn from my sin so I would once again walk in obedience and restoration with God and those around me. That is an example of godly repentance and is different from the remorse shown by Judas in Matthew 27:1–10.

This particular passage in Matthew opens with the chief priests and elders of the people sentencing Jesus to death. When Judas sees Jesus condemned and led away, he experiences a change of heart and returns the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders of the people. At first, it may seem like Judas has repented when he sees the devastation he caused in participating in the betrayal of Jesus, however, his change of heart should not be mistaken for genuine repentance. 2 Corinthians 7:10 best explains the type of remorse Judas showed was "worldly grief" because it does not lead to repentance. His remorse was an attempt to remove himself from the guilt of condemning an innocent man and led him to hanging himself instead of repenting from his sin.

There are many examples in the Bible of what godly repentance looks like. In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word שׁוּב means "return" and is used many times, especially in the Prophets, to describe repenting and turning back to the LORD after sinning or

wandering away from Him. This is the response Judas should have had after seeing Jesus condemned to death, but instead Matthew placed this part of the narrative here as a continuation of his contrast between Peter and Judas. At the end of chapter 26, Matthew discusses Peter's denial of Jesus and his refusal to be identified with Jesus, but then transitions into Judas' remorse and death where Judas reaped the consequences of his sin because he was filled with worldly grief. Repentance and reconciliation for Peter occurs later and is recorded in John 21:15–19 where Jesus shows him grace despite his earlier denial.

The difference between godly repentance and worldly grief and remorse is repenting at the heart level and completely turning away from sin rather than trying to cover the guilt and shame on our own. Despite feeling remorse and returning the silver, Judas died consumed with guilt and shame. If he had repented and turned away from his sin, then he could have experienced forgiveness and restoration like Peter ultimately did. It is important for us today to understand what genuine repentance is so we too can return to the Lord and experience forgiveness and grace.

**BIG IDEA: Godly repentance allows us to once again walk in obedience and restoration with God.**

**APPLY:**

- **Question:** How does this passage change or challenge your understanding of what repentance is?

- **Challenge:** Look at the times you repent of sin, does it lead you closer to God? Ask God to transform you.

**Week 13: Matthew 27:1-10**

**Day 3: The Voices that Shape Us**

**READ: Matthew 27:1-10**

**EXPLORE:**

This passage shows us the incredible dangers of aligning with those who do evil. In verse one of this chapter, we see the gathering of the Sanhedrin to judge Jesus. The night before, however, they met informally and illegally as it was against Jewish law to conduct trials at night to protect accuracy, transparency, and accountability. Judas aligned himself with the chief priests and elders, later regrets it, and gives the money back but not before it is far too late.

What is terrifying in this passage is that the group of individuals that came together to decide the fate of Jesus was not one that most would think of as evil. This was a group of religious and political elites who were highly respected in their community and seen as authoritative in the Jewish community. However, their hearts were hardened and cold to Jesus' claims and works and they sought to put Him to death. This counsel orchestrated the death of Christ and surrendered Him over to Pilate. This should challenge us to not only seek counsel from those who appear knowledgeable or have authority, but from those whose lives are transformed by the sanctifying work of Christ.

Scripture is clear that we must be cautious about those whom we take counsel from. Proverbs 13:20 says, "Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm." 1 Corinthians 15:33 says, "Do not be deceived: 'Bad company ruins good morals.'" Proverbs 1:10 says, "My son, if sinful men entice you, do not give in to them." We must be careful to walk with the wise, not the foolish, with those who keep good morals,

and with those who entice us to love and good works, not to evil. If the fruit of the Spirit is not evident in the actions and lives of those we turn to, they should not be our counselors, our trusted advisors. No one is perfect and evil is not always as clear as murder, so we must seek the Lord's discernment first and foremost and test the counsel (1 Jn. 4:1) we receive according to the Word of God.

Proverbs 27:5-6 says, "Better is open rebuke than hidden love. Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses." Our counselors ought to be correcting us in love, sharpening our faith (Prov. 27:17), encouraging us (1 Thess. 5:11), picking us up when we fall (Ecc. 4:10), and praying for us (Job 42:10).

**BIG IDEA: We must not seek counsel only from those who seem knowledgeable or authoritative but from those who faithfully obey God's Word and point us to obedience as well.**

**APPLY:**

- **Question:** Who do you turn to for counsel? What causes you to trust their counsel?

- **Question:** Do you seek advice from those who will affirm your desires, thoughts, attitudes, and intentions or do you seek advice from those who will speak God's truth in love no matter what?

- **Question:** Where is God in the people you keep company with and seek counsel from? Is God your primary and ultimate authority or do the opinions of others carry more weight?

**Week 13: Matthew 27:1-10**

**Day 4: For the Love of Money**

**READ: Matthew 27:1-10; 1 Timothy 6:6-10; Matthew 6:19-21**

**EXPLORE:**

Many created things have the potential to be used for great good or great evil. Fire, medications/drugs, knives, or the internet- these are referred to as morally neutral objects. Their moral impact depends on how they are used. It can be tempting (especially for risk-averse individuals) to simply avoid these things completely. Better to miss out on potential benefits than to risk being caught up in the potential darker side. Perhaps one of the most consequential or at least most prevalent of these morally neutral objects is money. And living in our society today, it is simply not an option to avoid money. Therefore, we must learn to recognize the potential dangers of money and identify quickly when dangerous patterns are emerging in our lives.

An often misquoted verse is 1 Timothy 6:10, which states, "The *love* of money is a root of all kinds of evils." The problem Paul identifies in this verse is not money itself, but the love of money. In the same passage, Paul states, "Those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction." In the ESV translation, it is described as a craving. One that presumably can never be fully satisfied. This is certainly demonstrated in the story of Judas, who ultimately takes his own life after using it to chase money.

There are many kinds of evil that money can lead to. Some are obvious: we can use money to buy things that are physically harmful, illegal, or simply not honoring to the Lord. Money can also be used more subtly to pridefully build ourselves up by worldly standards. We can also seek after money as a form of security. We may sacrifice giving to the church or helping a friend

in need in order to build a savings account that makes us feel prepared and in control no matter the circumstances that may come.

If we return to 1 Timothy, we find an underlying truth to help us combat any of these kinds of evils we are tempted with. Verse 7 confronts us with the fleeting nature of money and every other earthly thing we may store up for ourselves in this life. Jesus touches on similar themes in Matthew 6, pointing out how quickly and easily everything we have in this world can be taken away. We must consistently examine our lives, evaluating where we are storing our treasures. Jesus closes by stating, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." This creates a positive feedback loop: when we properly view the money we have and use it to invest in His Kingdom, we grow to love and value His Kingdom more, and we can joyfully continue to invest in it.

**BIG IDEA: We should learn from Judas the devastating effects of loving money over God. We must not make eternal sacrifices for the fleeting pleasures of money.**

**APPLY:**

- **Challenge:** Take time to confess and repent of any kinds of evil you have fallen into related to the love of money.

- **Question:** Take a quick inventory of where you are spending your money. Are there any areas in which you feel called to invest in God's heavenly Kingdom?

**Week 13: Matthew 27:1-10**

**Day 5: The Shepherd Slain Over the Pot Broken**

**READ: Matthew 27:1-10**

**EXPLORE:**

What's the best way to prove a point? You can prove a point by citing a notable source that agrees with you. You can prove a point by making a great, reasonable argument. You can even prove a point by just looking something up online and finding someone somewhere that agrees with you! But perhaps the best way to really hammer something down is to use a real world illustration that catches everyone's attention and everyone remembers. An ancient Greek philosopher named Diogenes wanted to prove that most people pretend to be busy and perform tasks just to be seen by others. He showed this to everyone by rolling an enormous storage jar everywhere he went so that people would ask him about it and he would tell them he didn't want to be the only one not doing anything… The prophets in the Old Testament often performed similar tasks which are relevant for our passage.

In Jeremiah 18, God tells Jeremiah to observe a potter making a pot. When Jeremiah goes to observe the potter at work he sees the clay spoil in the potter's hands. The potter then changes entirely what he was making the pot into. God says He will do the same with Israel. He was forming Israel into a great nation to proclaim His name to the world but now it will be taken over, and its people will be forced to be exiles. This was what God wanted Jeremiah to understand so that he could tell all of Israel of what was to come. God then tells Jeremiah in chapter 19 to buy a pot so that he could smash it in front of all the people signifying the impending judgment. Talk about an illustration to get everyone's attention! Matthew brings up these passages in Jeremiah and combines them with Zechariah to give some context to what Judas has done. In Zechariah 11 God tells Zechariah to become His

shepherd for the ungrateful sheep of Israel. Zechariah accepts the responsibility and then eventually quits shepherding and asks the people for the wages he has earned for his duties. They give him only thirty pieces of silver which was the price of a slave and God says not to keep the money. God tells Zechariah to give the money to the potter and proceeds to explain that bad shepherds will now rule over the people.

In Zechariah, the people sold out God for 30 pieces of silver (Zechariah represented God as a prophet and anointed shepherd) that was given to the potter. In Jeremiah, a pot was purchased to display that God was going to judge His people. Matthew combines these two ideas and says that Judas fulfills both these ideas in his betrayal of Christ. How? Because Jesus as God's good shepherd was sold for 30 pieces of silver which eventually went to the potter. The potter received the money, and his land was used for unclaimed dead bodies. But what about the broken pot?

Israel would be destroyed by God in 70 AD based on their rejection of their own Messiah. But also Jesus Himself would be destroyed on the cross as the ultimate sacrificial act for His people and the world. Rather than Jesus destroy the wicked ones who put Him on the cross He chose to forgive them and provide a way of salvation to all who would believe.

**BIG IDEA: Jesus became the broken vessel so we would not have to be.**

**APPLY:**

- **Challenge**: Think of a more modern example of a way in which you could wake someone up to their sin and their need to be saved from God's wrath.

**Week 14: Matthew 27:11-26**

**Day 1: A Day to Explore**
**READ: Matthew 27:11-26**

*Instructions*: Spend time reading Matthew 27:11-26 and complete the activities and questions below.

**Activity:** While reading, include some observations in the space below.

**Question:** Why do you think that Pilate chose to speak with Jesus?

**Question:** Why do you think Jesus answered in the manner that He did?

**Question:** What do you think Pilate was thinking as Jesus was being accused and not defending Himself?

**Question:** What is the significance behind the crowd choosing a prisoner over Jesus?

**Question:** Why do you think Matthew includes the fact that Pilate's wife dreamed about Jesus?

**Questions:** Why didn't Pilate just release Jesus? Was Jesus' blood still on Pilate's hands?

**Question:** Why do you think the crowd was so stirred up?

**Activity:** Write about times in the past where you have been really quick to defend yourself and think about how you could have acted more like Christ in those moments.

**Week 14: Matthew 27:11-26**

**Day 2: You Have Said So**

**READ: Matthew 27:11-26; John 18:28-38**

**EXPLORE:**

Matthew now turns his attention back to what's going on with Jesus. The Jewish religious leaders have already held their trial (however illegitimate it may have been). And now, not having the authority to actually put Jesus to death (John 18:31), they deliver him to Pilate for a civil trial.

There have been many accusations against Jesus, but Pilate focuses on the one that concerns Rome: claiming to be a King. He had been accused of many things, but sedition and treason were allegations the governor surely had to investigate. So, Pilate asks Jesus directly, "Are you the King of the Jews?" The *you* here is emphatic and suggests Pilate sees this as an almost laughable claim. Looking at the man before him, Pilate is not impressed with Jesus or his chance of raising an army to rebel against Roman authority.

However, rather than outright denying this treasonous accusation, Jesus replies, "You have said so". The same response He gave to the high priest in the previous trial in chapter 26. What about these two questions elicits an answer from Jesus, who has otherwise remained silent?

Matthew does not specify in detail all the accusations that were made against Jesus. However, a few are mentioned, including claims that He threatened to destroy the physical temple, advocated for followers not to pay taxes, and incited rebellion. Each one of these pertains to the physical or earthly realm. To these accusations, Jesus made no defense.

In contrast, when questioned on His identity as the Christ, the Son of God, and King, He answers. He answers affirmatively, knowing the risk He is taking in doing so. The parallel passage in John 18 gives a little more insight as it elaborates on Jesus' answer. In John, Jesus clarifies to Pilate that His Kingdom is not of this world. So He is not denying being a King, but is denying the implication that Pilate and the Roman authorities would attach to this claim. Jesus is not interested in fighting for earthly authority. He didn't even fight for earthly justice against the wrongful accusations brought against Him. Instead, He chose to speak only in matters of eternal truths—matters that impacted his heavenly Kingdom. After His initial response to Pilate's question, He goes on in John to say, "For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice."

Jesus did not choose His response to each allegation based on the potential consequences of His answers. His response did not even depend solely on whether or not the accusation was true. He chose to respond only to questions pertinent to His heavenly Kingdom and mission.

**BIG IDEA: Jesus is not interested in defending His physical circumstances or reputation but rather in defending spiritual truths.**

**APPLY:**

- **Question:** In what ways can you strive to listen to Jesus' voice and be "of the truth"?

- **Question:** In what ways this week (big or small) can you follow Jesus' example by forsaking defense of your earthly circumstances/reputation and investing in his heavenly kingdom?

**Week 14: Matthew 27:11-26**

**Day 3: The Choice of Man over God**

**READ: Matthew 27:11-26**

**EXPLORE:**

Imagine you could choose what situation you were born into… What would you choose? What time period would come to mind? Would you choose today? 50 years ago? 1000 years ago? 1000 years in the future? What kind of family would you want to be born into? A family of royalty? A middle class suburb family? A family with a lot of siblings or one with very little? I bet you wouldn't choose to be born in a poor family 2000 years ago. No one wants to be born into poverty. Many people overcome poverty, some truly accept it, and a few actually seek it out when nothing in the world can satisfy them. But to actually choose it from the beginning would be unheard of. And yet, Jesus as the Word of God decided to be born into a poor family 2000 years ago. He oftentimes identified with the poor. He warned constantly about the dangers of being rich. He was truly THE man of the people. He healed the sick, the demon oppressed, the downtrodden, the confused, the misguided. He brought true eternal purpose to the ordinary men and women. He taught of a kingdom where having a heart for God and neighbor was paramount. And how was He repaid?

There was a chance to take it all back. One chance to right the wrongs done to the very Son of God. Pilate himself could have released Jesus. He found no wrong in Him. He knew that Jesus did not deserve to die and that He was condemned purely from jealousy. What a sham of a governor! But instead Pilate gives the decision to the people. Instead of Jesus' fate being in the hands of the rich and privileged it goes to the people. The people have seen Jesus. The man who healed the helpless in the temple. The man to whom the children cried, "Hosanna!" The man that answered all the questions like no other. The man who called the

religious elite to a genuine heart. What more could the people want out of a man? What more would you want out of a king? Jesus was gentle. He was loving to the unlovable. Where was His advocate?! No one stood with this man. Where were those He healed? Where were those who cried Hosanna when He entered Jerusalem? Where were His disciples? Gone. The true abandonment of Christ is right here. Pilate seems to expect Jesus to be chosen if given the option. He asks the crowd, "Do you want Jesus or the murderer?"

Many people wonder, "How could mankind suffer on account of Adam and Eve?" My answer is that we would all have made the same decision. Similarly, if we were in the crowd we would not have chosen Christ. We would have feared the crowd, feared the chief priests and elders, feared the Romans. And so, we all collectively choose the murderer because he represents us. We all have blood on our hands with the sins we have committed. We don't want to pay the price for our sin. We want Jesus to pay the price. And unbelievably Jesus accepts. He says I will pay what you owe. I will die so this murderer can go free. Pilate was not in charge in this moment. The Jewish leaders were likewise not either. God Himself chose to be killed. What a savior. What an undeserving people. There's no real application this day but to thank God for what you did not have to face thanks to Jesus' decision in this moment.

**BIG IDEA: We chose to condemn Christ, and He accepts.**

**APPLY:**

- **Challenge:** Pray to God for a heart that can truly recognize Jesus' sacrifice for you.

**Week 14: Matthew 27:11-26**

**Day 4: God Almighty**

**READ: Matthew 27:11-26**

**EXPLORE:**

There is a (not very theologically accurate) movie called Bruce Almighty in which the main character, frustrated with the way his life is going, blames God. In return, God offers Bruce his full power since he thinks he can do a better job as God. As you can imagine, it doesn't go well for Bruce, and there is a particular scene in which he is trying to manage all the prayers coming in, and no matter what he does, he is completely overwhelmed by the sheer amount of them. It is a silly but eye-opening scene that just scratches the surface of all the matters God tends to each day.

We can often easily envision God working in our lives and our immediate vicinity. We see the ways He is guiding us or moving in our neighborhood, work, or school. However, when we stop to think outside of our circle, it is truly amazing to think of all the many places and ways the Lord is working. Today we'll focus on Pilate's wife and the warning she receives through a dream. Dreams are used throughout Scripture for several different purposes. Primarily, dreams are used to prophesy, warn, and guide. Dreams accomplish their purpose via clear and direct messages (such as the Lord telling Joseph to flee to Egypt with Mary) and sometimes are more metaphorical, requiring interpretation (such as Pharaoh's dreams). God uses dreams to accomplish these purposes not just in the lives of His people, but also in the lives of people who are far from Him. Pilate's wife is a perfect example of a seemingly insignificant character who hears directly from God. When examining the use of dreams throughout the Bible, there are common elements present each time God chooses to communicate in this way. The first is the alignment of the message with Scripture. The Bible is the ultimate, complete, authoritative word of God, and if a message received through a

dream contradicts the Bible in any way, it is not from the Lord. Secondly, the Lord always makes the message clear. Sometimes it takes prayer and meditation, and sometimes another messenger to interpret, but God never leaves the meaning of a dream ambiguous.

There are debates on the extent to which God still speaks through dreams today, but one thing is for certain: God certainly CAN accomplish it if He chooses to communicate in this manner. It can be easy to get bogged down in the details surrounding dream interpretation, but there is a lot to gain from taking a step back and looking at the big picture of how God is working. At any moment, God is working in so many more ways than we can possibly imagine. For Him, each and every life was paid for at a great cost, and there are therefore no insignificant characters. In the Middle East he is speaking to Muslims in dreams and visions guiding them to the gospel. In a middle school math class He is prompting a 7th-grade boy to befriend a nonbeliever in His class who needs it. Driving down the highway He is speaking through a worship song on the radio to a woman who feels she is not worthy of His attention. He is actively working in every individual life, pursuing them for His glory.

**BIG IDEA: God is active in more ways than we can imagine; we should seek to be in tune with the ways & places in which He is moving.**

**APPLY:**

- **Question:** What ways or places do you tend to doubt the Lord works in?

- **Challenge:** Reflect back on the ways the Lord has worked in your life thus far and thank Him for pursuing you.

**Week 14: Matthew 27:11-26**

**Day 5: The Scared Ruler**

**READ: Matthew 27:11-26**

**EXPLORE:**

Those who grew up in traditional churches are familiar with the name Pontius Pilate from the Apostles' Creed, where Christians recite every Sunday, "***He (Jesus) suffered under Pontius Pilate.***"

Pontius Pilate's early life is largely obscure. He served as the Roman prefect (governor) of Judaea from AD 26 to 36 under Emperor Tiberius. The title prefect was originally a military designation, and Pilate exercised military, administrative, and judicial authority over Judaea, Samaria, and Idumea. Josephus and other ancient sources portray him as a cruel, decisive, and stubborn ruler who showed little respect for Jewish traditions and frequently offended Jewish religious leaders.

According to Josephus, Pilate was removed from office after violently suppressing a Samaritan gathering on Mount Gerizim around AD 36 to see sacred vessels supposedly buried by Moses on the mountain. The Samaritans sent a formal complaint to the Roman authorities, claiming that their assembly was not a revolt but a peaceful gathering. As a result, Pilate was ordered to return to Rome to report to Emperor Tiberius. However, Tiberius died before Pilate arrived, and Pilate's fate afterward is uncertain. Western tradition holds that he committed suicide, while Coptic and Ethiopian traditions claim that Pilate repented, became a Christian, and suffered martyrdom. Interestingly, he is venerated as a saint by Coptic and Ethiopian Christians.

In the New Testament, Pilate's name appears 63 times as the Roman governor of Judaea who sentenced Jesus to be crucified. He is depicted as a weak and indecisive leader who yielded to pressure from the Jewish authorities. He knew Jesus was innocent

but handed Jesus over to be flogged and crucified, and Pilate released Barabbas instead. He was hesitant and avoided responsibility. He was afraid of the crowd stirred up by Jewish leaders. He was manipulated by the Jewish leaders.

In conclusion, Pilate was more afraid of losing his power than of God, and yielded to pressure rather than pursuing the truth. This is demonstrated in the conversation with Jesus from John 18:37-38: [Jesus said], *"I was born and came into the world to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me."*

*"What is truth?" retorted Pilate. With this he went out again to the Jews gathered there …*

**BIG IDEA: Facing pressure from crowds or from superiors is not an excuse for ignoring the truth.** ***Jesus said in Matthew 10:28 "Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, fear Him who can destroy both soul and body in hell."***

**APPLY:**

- **Question:** Have you been in situations where being faithful to Jesus could be disadvantageous or cost you financially?

- **Question:** If you have, how did you handle them?

- **Challenge:** We are living in a world that teaches against biblical principles and truth. When we face situations where following Jesus seems disadvantageous, we must have faith in God and obey Him. By doing so, not only will we experience God's hand in our lives, but others will also see His power. Let's remain faithful to Jesus even if it may cost us financially or affect our careers!

**Week 15: Matthew 27:27-44**

**Day 1: A Day to Explore**
**READ: Matthew 27:27-44**

*Instructions*: Spend time reading Matthew 27:27-44 and complete the activities and questions below.

**Activity:** While reading, include some observations in the space below.

**Question:** Why do you think soldiers were so cruel to Jesus?

**Question:** What significance do you see with Simon carrying Jesus' cross?

**Question:** Why do you think that they offered Jesus wine? Why did He refuse?

**Question:** Why do you think they put the “the King of the Jews” above Jesus on the cross?

**Activity:** Write down the ironic statements in the passage. These are the statements that are said to Jesus in a mocking way but actually are true.

**Question:** Why do you think the chief priests, scribes, and elders still ask for a sign even in a mocking way? What does this say about their hearts?

**Question:** Luke tells us that one of the robbers actually defends Jesus and Jesus saves Him because of it. To harmonize these accounts it appears that one robber changed his mind. What does this say about the grace of Jesus?

**Activity:** Read Psalm 22. Write down the parallels with this passage.

**Week 15: Matthew 27:27-44**

**Day 2: The Sufferings of Our Savior**

**READ: Matthew 27:27-44**

**EXPLORE:**

In our passage for this week, we see the sufferings of Jesus. We see His dignity stripped away. We see Him crucified among thieves. The Savior of the world was hung upon one of the most brutal means of death humanity ever invented. Not only did Christ deal with the wrath and mockery of man, but He also had God's wrath poured out onto Him for the sins of the world.

The process Jesus underwent for His crucifixion was brutal. He was beaten and scourged with a whip that cut His flesh. He dealt with mockery and shaming. He was stripped of human dignity and had His broken body hung upon a cross. However, all of this was not without purpose. These horrific things fulfilled prophecies and ensured that Christ could sympathize with us. All throughout Christ's life, He had been tempted and suffered the things that all humans suffer, and as the book of Hebrews says, "we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses."

One of the key things that makes Christianity distinct is that mankind does not reach up to God. Instead, God reaches down to man. Through Christ and His sufferings, both divine and physical, we have a perfectly relatable savior. He is not distant or removed from our trials, but He went through all of them and did not sin. He was mocked on the cross and given a robe and crown. The crowds chanted at Him and told Him to come down. However, He remained and ensured that God's plan was fulfilled. Just as He was tempted in the wilderness and did not give in, He did not disobey His Father. He held fast in the face of every temptation and trial, and by His sacrifice made way for us to have eternal life with Him.

While I (Cohen) was writing this WTL, the hymn “What a friend we have in Jesus” kept coming to my mind. The Savior of the world, who suffered unimaginable abuse, chose to relate to you and me. The sufferings of our Savior reflect our own losses and trials, and by His death we can call Him our friend. As the song goes, “What a Friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear!” As believers, all of our sins and griefs were borne by Jesus on that cross. He was beaten and abused for the sake of our sin, and it ought to be a sobering thought. However, we have the privilege to speak to Him as a close friend.

**BIG IDEA: The sufferings of our Savior allow Him to perfectly relate to us, and we ought to rejoice in the work of our Savior. For by it, we are able to have eternal life and be reconciled with God.**

**APPLY:**

- **Question:** How does Jesus’ suffering change your perspective on how He relates to the trials in your own life?

- **Question:** Jesus stayed on the cross when He could have come down. Where are you tempted to take an easier road instead of trusting the Father?

**Week 15: Matthew 27:27-44**

**Day 3: The Crucified King**

**READ: Matthew 27:27-44**

**EXPLORE:**

There was the King: surrounded by the symbols of kingship being used as instruments of humiliation. Roman soldiers draped Him in a scarlet robe, pressed a crown on His head, placed a reed in His hand, and knelt before Him in "homage."

Above the cross, the charge announced Him as "the King of the Jews." The soldiers, religious leaders, passersby, and even the criminals beside Him treated that title as a cruel joke. Matthew's irony is unmistakable: they spoke more truth than they understood. The mocked prisoner was, in fact, the rightful King. But not just the king of the Jews, Israel's Messiah is the world's Lord. At Calvary, His reign appeared impossibly narrow: hands fixed to wood, followers scattered, enemies triumphant. Yet, Psalm 2:7–8 revealed the scale of His kingdom. The One rejected near Jerusalem will receive worship among every nation. Amen!

Isaiah 53:8 predicted that Messiah would be taken away by oppression and judgment and cut off from the land of the living for the transgression of His people. Jesus did not remain on the cross because He lacked royal power. He remained because His royal mission was to bear the guilt of others. His crown was thorned because humanity's curse had to be carried. His throne was a cross because His subjects needed redemption before they could share His kingdom. This truth overturns ordinary ideas of authority. Earthly rulers protect themselves, display power, and compel service. Jesus gave Himself, accepted shame, and served sinners to the point of death. The taunt, "He saved others; he cannot save himself," unintentionally described the choice before Him. To save Himself would be to abandon those He came to

save. His refusal to descend from the cross was not weakness but faithful, sovereign love.

The crucifixion also confronts every reader. It is possible to stand near Jesus, use correct religious language, and still refuse His rule. The soldiers bowed without worship. The leaders knew the Scriptures without receiving the One who fulfilled them. The crowds saw the sign above His head but demanded proof on their own terms. However, since Jesus is the rightful King, He deserves repentance, allegiance, obedience, and public praise.

Therefore, exalt Christ to the world. Speak of Him not as one spiritual option among many, but as the crucified and risen Son whose claim extends to every nation. Let our homes, churches, and workplaces display the character of His kingdom through generosity and love. Proclaim His cross without embarrassment, for there the King conquered sin by sacrifice. Invite others to behold the royal glory hidden in suffering love.

Jesus' name means "Yahweh saves." Spend a moment imagining the paradox of the taunt, "He saved others; he cannot save himself." Praise Him that He lived up to His name by NOT saving Himself from the cross.

**BIG IDEA: The cross reveals a King no sinner could deserve and every sinner desperately needs.**

**APPLY:**

- **Question:** In your life, how have you been near the King—and even *in* His kingdom—but still refused His rule?

- **Challenge:** Sacrifice your selfish desires at home, work, school, even at church, and thereby proclaim the victory of King Jesus!

**Week 15: Matthew 27:27-44**

**Day 4: Affirmed by Archaeology**

**READ: Matthew 27:27-44**

**EXPLORE:**

One thing that is amazing about the Bible is that it is backed up by history. Real people in real time doing real things. However, in the past few centuries scholarship has leaned toward skepticism regarding biblical claims. If a story is not backed up by corroborating evidence, they said it should not be believed. How could we ever really know if Jesus healed the blind, if He walked on water, or if He rose from the dead? Some things must be taken on faith, but what about others?

One way to corroborate written accounts is archaeology. Archaeology is not perfect of course but it is thought to be the most reliable to scholarship. One of the most verified facts of ancient history is that Jesus died on a wooden cross by the orders of Pontius Pilate. The entire religion of Christianity relies on that basic historic event taking place even before we get to the empty tomb! There have been some scholars who have always tried to refute that fundamental truth claim of Christianity. There are a few scholars who just claim Jesus did not exist at all and was made up but they are few and far between. Others though who do not believe in the veracity of Scripture will dispute little details. It really is odd that these scholars believe those closest to Jesus would come up with a story that gets mostly small details wrong… You would think if someone made up a story they would make sure to get all the little details right…but what do I know? Anyways, at one time there were two details that were harshly criticized found in the Gospel narrative.

The first was that Pontius Pilate never existed. This claim was based on the fact that there was no external evidence of Pontius Pilate in Roman records. There was skepticism that he must have

been invented by the disciples until the Pilate Stone was discovered. The stone was found in Caesarea Maritima on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. The discovery was limestone with an inscription etched into it that said, “Tiberium Pontius Prefect of Judea” and dated to around 26-36 AD.

The second skepticism that scholars had around the crucifixion was around the method. It was believed that the cost of nails would’ve been too high to waste on a condemned criminal so rope would’ve made more sense. Even if rope was used normally, it seems someone as high profile as Jesus still could have received nails. But there was an amazing discovery that actually proved nails were used in crucifixions during this time. In 1968 an ossuary (similar to a coffin) was found in a tomb that was labeled Yehohanan. This man named Yehohanan was found to have a nail still lodged into his heel! The nail was likely still in his heel because it had curled and they couldn’t get it back off. This discovery proved that nails were used in crucifixion and it actually shows that a crucified victim could be buried in a tomb rather than thrown somewhere in disgrace like others have suggested. These discoveries show the reliability of the Bible and should help us in witnessing to others about our faith that is not blind but based on real world evidence!

**BIG IDEA: The Bible is backed up by archaeology!**

**APPLY:**

- **Challenge:** Bring this up with someone you see today!

**Week 15: Matthew 27:27-44**

**Day 5: Because He Loved Us**

**READ: Matthew 27:27-44**

**EXPLORE:**

Have you ever watched someone you love bullied? Maybe like me, you watched older kids bully your sibling. Or maybe you've watched your kids be the recipient of the harsh words or actions of others. Something visceral rises within us that makes us want to retaliate. I would guess there are a few of us who have looked at our own kids and said, "You don't have to take that from them." In this passage we get a front row seat to the greatest physical and verbal assault any human has ever endured. And Jesus, fully God and fully man endures all of it without an ounce of resistance.

As they put the crown of the thorns on His head and sarcastically label Him King of the Jews, they mock His authority. They strip Him of His clothing, leaving Him exposed, mocking His manhood. They split up His garments and profited from them. After leaving Him a shell of Himself physically, they verbally assaulted Him. They questioned His power. The man who proclaimed to be the Savior of the world, could not save Himself.

They questioned His connection with God the Father, claiming if God really wanted to, He would deliver Him. But while they hurl insults and slowly kill Him, Jesus says nothing. He does nothing. He understands in that moment that the only way to make atonement for humanity lies not in His ability to fight back, but His willingness to surrender. When the movie The Passion of the Christ was about to be released, I found myself in a room with a few hundred youth pastors and ministry leaders. One of the producers of the film had come to this event, asked us to surrender our phones, and in return we would get to see an early screening of the film. As the scene as described in this passage

was played out on a giant screen in front of all of us, the whole place went silent. When the movie ended and the credits rolled, not one clap was heard. No one moved and what followed I can only describe as collective wailing. Men and women, of vastly different backgrounds and social status all wept, many on their faces. Imagine if He'd turned into a super hero and one by one destroyed each Roman leader. Perhaps the people would have cheered. But His display of surrender and sacrifice was one of overwhelming love, a love that is beyond what our minds can fully comprehend. In the room that day, every one of us felt the weight of a love so deep and a sacrifice so real; a love *for us*. Nothing He asks us to endure will ever compare to what He did that day on the cross *because He loved us.*

**BIG IDEA: As you read this passage, may you see past the injustice and the cruelty of those leaders and remember that Jesus endured the torture and the mockery, *so that you might be saved*. Our salvation lay on the other side of His surrender.**

**APPLY:**

- **Question:** When is the last time you meditated on what Jesus endured leading up to and on the cross that day? Take a minute and allow yourself to be reminded of how deep His love for you is.

- **Challenge:** What is something you feel He's asked you to bear now? Ask Him to walk beside you in that, to encourage you that the same Spirit that was in Him is in you.

**Week 16: Matthew 27:45-56**

**Day 1: A Day to Explore**
**READ: Matthew 27:45-56**

*Instructions*: Spend time reading Matthew 27:45-56 and complete the activities and questions below.

**Activity:** While reading, include some observations in the space below.

**Question:** Why exactly do you think darkness fell upon the land?

**Question:** Do you think that Jesus was actually forsaken on the cross and/or was He referencing Psalm 22 in which the phrase was more poetic?

**Question:** Why do you think the crowd thought Jesus would be calling for Elijah?

**Question:** Why do you think that someone offered Jesus a drink?

**Question:** What did the veil of the temple being torn in two mean?

**Question:** Why do you think that bodies of the saints were raised?

**Question:** Why do you think the centurion was led to believe and say Jesus was the Son of God?

**Activity:** Read Psalm 22 and write down the parallels to the Passion of Christ.

**Week 16: Matthew 27:45-56**

**Day 2: It Is Finished**

**READ: Psalm 22**

**EXPLORE:**

"Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?", which is "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?". Many readers struggle and toil over these famous last words in the Gospels. If Jesus is God, and God is all knowing, why would Jesus cry out this question? Didn't He know full well what He came to do? Did God withhold this part of the plan from Him, somehow? How can God forsake Himself---meaning, abandon Himself, or, break covenant with Himself? If you struggle with the theology of the Trinity, which, let's just be honest, the majority of the Christian population does, this can be very puzzling. I'm sorry to disappoint you, I myself, nor this Word To Life, is going to give you insight into the theology of the Trinity. However, we will dive into Psalm 22 to answer the question of why Jesus spoke his last words as He did. If you have not already, read Psalm 22 now. This Psalm can almost give you chills, can't it? Even at your first read-over, you should see the similarity between the prophecy that occurred about 1,000 years before Christ's coming and the events that truly took place on the cross. When you read it as a whole, you can clearly see that David (the writer of this specific Psalm) did not and was not experiencing these specifics. Let's look at the instances side by side to track how the prophecy was made true by Jesus' life, ultimate death on a cross, and even what the cross accomplished, all evidenced and prophesied by David an entire millennium prior.

| **Psalm 22** | **Matthew 27/Other context** |
|---|---|
| **1** My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from my cries of anguish? | • Jesus's words alone throughout the Bible as recorded in Matthew and Mark. Jesus cries out in a loud voice before giving up His spirit in all accounts except John. |

| | |
|---|---|
| **2** My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, but I find no rest.<br>**7** All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads.<br>**8** "He trusts in the Lord," they say, "let the Lord rescue him. Let him deliver him, since he delights in him."<br>**14** I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint. My heart has turned to wax; it has melted within me.<br>**15** My mouth is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth; you lay me in the dust of death.<br>**16** Dogs surround me,a pack of villains encircles me; they pierce my hands and my feet.<br>**18** They divide my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment.<br>**22** I will declare your name to my people; in the assembly I will praise you. | • Jesus' sentiment in the garden of Gethsemane during His prayers to God (Mat. 26:36-38).<br>• Jesus was specifically mocked in this manner (Mat. 27:39).<br>• Words from the chief priests, scribes and elders (Mat 27:41-42).<br>• See John 19:34 / the occurrence of bones being out of joint would be a consequence of crucifixion.<br>• See John 19:28. Jesus' body was laid in a tomb.<br>• While none of the Gospel accounts describe that Jesus' hands and feet were pierced by nails, His appearances to the disciples after His resurrection record the marks on His hands and feet in Luke and John.<br>• See Mat. 27:35, Mark 15:24, Luke 23:34 and John 19:23-24.<br>• This is the call for the Great Commission, Mat. 28:16-20. |

**BIG IDEA: Psalm 22:26-31 is the here and now; it came about through the Son of Man's death on a cross to fulfill the Scriptures so that we could seek the Lord and our hearts would live forever. This happened so that all the ends of the earth could remember and turn to the Lord. It was prophesied in the Psalms, was fulfilled on the cross, and we get to live today in the benefits of this fulfillment---the with-ness of God. Hallelujah, it is finished!**

**APPLY:**

- **Question:** How can you seek God today?

**Week 16: Matthew 27:45-56**

**Day 3: Elijah and Being Forsaken by God**

**READ: Matthew 27:45-50; Psalm 22; 1 Kings 19:1-8; Numbers 6:24-26**

**EXPLORE:**

The words Jesus uttered while He hung on the cross have been the focus of study and meditation among thinking Christians for millennia. And rightly so! Amid the excruciating (and I do mean that, for it is derived from the Latin which means 'to torture upon a cross') pain, the amount of effort Jesus would have expended to say anything would have taken every ounce of remaining energy. By quoting the opening line of Psalm 22, Jesus is giving full expression to what it means to be forsaken by God, the first and only time that happened to Him. He experienced the full wrath of God and the full meaning of what it means to experience the precise opposite of the Aaronic blessing (in Numbers 6). He most likely uttered those words in Aramaic, for that was likely His mother tongue.

Why, however, did the crowd assume He was calling for Elijah? We recall the life of Elijah, that as the prophet of God, immediately after the incident on Mt. Carmel, he had to flee for his life and in despair wanted to die (I Kings 19:1-8). Both Elijah and David were unjustly pursued and, in desperation, cried out for vindication. In both cases, God did intervene. God saved David from Saul and from Absalom; God sent His angel to strengthen Elijah for his journey to Mt. Horeb (Sinai) where he experienced the presence of God. Elijah never experienced death, having been taken away by chariots of fire; David died an old man in the presence of his family. So, it is understandable why the crowd might have heard what, amid his effort to say anything, might have sounded like 'Elijah' instead of 'Eloi' in quoting Psalm 22. The 'why' wasn't Jesus wanting to know the reason. For He already knew the reason. The psalm, written a thousand years

earlier, was the one psalm that gave expression to, and pointed exhaustively to what was going on with 'the Son of David'. This Son was fulfilling completely what His father (David) only experienced slightly – the full forsakenness of God.

A century after his death, Elizabeth Barrett Browning (one of my favorite poets) wrote a poem about William Cowper (one of my favorite hymnwriters and a collaborator with John Newton), who suffered from suicidal depression, entitled 'On Cowper's Grave', the final stanza of which is this:

> Yea, once, Immanuel's orphaned cry his universe hath shaken –
> It went up single, echoless, "My God, I am forsaken!"
> It went up from the Holy's lips amid his lost creation,
> That, of the lost, no son should use those words of desolation!

Browning asserts that Jesus cried, "My God, I am forsaken" so that for all eternity William Cowper would not have to. Jesus cried, "My God, I am forsaken" so that Chris D'Souza wouldn't have to. And neither would Elijah or David or anyone whom the Father gave to Jesus. Every time I read that last line of the poem, I get shivers. If we belong to Jesus, we are sons of His Father, and you and I will never have to "use those words of desolation!"

**BIG IDEA: When Jesus suffered, He was suffering on behalf of sinners like you and me. Jesus suffered and died in our place as our substitute and bore our curse. What amazing grace!**

**APPLY:**

- **Challenge:** On the Cross, there was a double transaction. Our sins were transferred to Him and punished. His righteousness was transferred to us. This is nothing short of Amazing Grace. Live today, tomorrow and for the rest of your life in amazement of it!

**Week 16: Matthew 27:45-56**

**Day 4: Good News! The Curtain Has Been Torn**

**READ: Hebrews 10:19-25**

**EXPLORE:**

Today's WTL will focus on the significance of the tearing of the curtain in Matthew 27:51. We will begin by examining the significance of the veil in the tabernacle through passages from Exodus and Leviticus. Then, we will look at what Matthew describes and, finally, turn to the book of Hebrews to understand how we should interpret and respond to the tearing of the veil.

In Exodus 26, God describes to Moses how to construct the tabernacle, which was the forerunner to the temple. In verses 31–35, God describes how the veil was to be constructed and hung within the tabernacle. He tells Moses, "*The veil shall separate for you the Holy Place from the Most Holy.*" The Most Holy Place, sometimes referred to as the Holy of Holies, was the dwelling place of the divine presence. Leviticus 16:2 describes this: "*Tell Aaron your brother not to come at any time into the Holy Place inside the veil, before the mercy seat that is on the ark, so that he may not die. For I will appear in the cloud over the mercy seat.*" Leviticus 16 goes on to describe the process by which the high priest could enter the Holy Place once a year. Access to the dwelling place of the divine presence was strictly limited to this one occasion and was only permitted with the proper sacrifices. The veil surrounding the Most Holy Place separated God's people from the direct presence of God. Matthew 27:51 describes the tearing of the curtain in the temple: "*And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split.*" The fact that this occurred immediately following the death of Jesus shows that, through Christ, God's people are no longer separated from His presence. The sacrificial system outlined in Leviticus has been fulfilled in the person and work of Christ. The veil being torn from top to bottom also shows us that access to the divine presence is God's work.

We do not remove the barrier ourselves; God removes it for us through Christ. Hebrews 10:19–23 says: "*Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.*" Through the sacrifice of Jesus, we have been made clean. We have been given access to God and, through the Holy Spirit, our bodies have become dwelling places of His presence. We can now approach God with confidence because Christ has completed the work necessary to bring us into His presence.

**BIG IDEA: Rejoice in the completed work of Christ! The veil has been torn, the barrier has been removed, and through Jesus, we have access to God.**

**APPLY:**

- **Question:** How does understanding the significance of the veil and its tearing change the way you view Matthew 27:51?

- **Challenge:** Think about all that was accomplished through the death of Jesus. Meditate on Hebrews 10:19–23 and thank God for tearing the veil and removing the barrier between His presence and His people.

- **Question:** How should having direct access to God through Christ affect the way you approach Him in prayer, worship, and daily life?

**Week 16: Matthew 27:45-56**

**Day 5: Can These Dry Bones Live?**

**READ: Matthew 27:45-56**

**EXPLORE:**

About one in five Americans claim to have seen a ghost. In the most advanced civilization to ever exist with all of our technology and sophisticated beliefs, people are still persuaded by the supernatural. This WTL will not be a biblical view on ghosts, but it will ask you the question. If you saw a ghost, I mean really felt that you saw a ghost how would you tell other people? Most of us would naturally be skeptical but if you were the actual one that saw something you might feel a lot different. It is difficult to tell someone something that you know is true but really hard to believe. It's honestly why many of us do not share the gospel too often, we don't want to look silly. But if something is true and hard to believe the best thing to do is to just say what happened.

One of the strangest scenes of the entire Bible has to be when the saints are raised up from the dead out of their tombs and speaking with those in Jerusalem. After Jesus dies on the cross an earthquake hits which causes the veil of the temple to split into two and tombs to be opened. A very literal reading of the passage reads as if the tombs were opened, the saints were raised, and then they waited to leave their tombs until Jesus was resurrected. Chances are that the meaning of the verses is that the saints were raised only after Jesus was raised. But what do we do with the passage? What does it mean?

The event seems to read as if it is a mini-resurrection of the dead. That is to say that this scene is intended to foreshadow the future resurrection of the dead where everyone will be raised before judgment. It is also possible (although slightly problematic) that Matthew meant this in a spiritual sense. That the people who had believed in the future Messiah were simply taken up to be with

Jesus in heaven. Under this view the holy city would be the New Jerusalem in heaven waiting to come down. The problem with this interpretation is of course the fact that it says the saints appeared to many. How would they appear to people in a spiritual sense?

Some commentators also speculate that it's possible Jesus' resurrection was so powerful that it caused others around Him to rise from the dead as well. While possible this interpretation seems odd because it comes across as something that happened to happen rather than something that God actively caused to happen.

It is more reasonable to conclude that Matthew simply wrote down an event that happened. This event confirms that Jesus' resurrection will lead to the resurrection of others. It proves that resurrection is not a one-time thing, but now has been made possible through the faithfulness of the Son of God. Jesus rises from the dead and now looks to resurrect all those who are His. Matthew was faithful to write down what he saw despite how any skeptics might read his work. We should likewise be faithful to tell the good news of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ despite how crazy those in the world might look at us. Paul says this well when he says that the cross is foolish to both Jew and Gentile but that God uses what is foolish to shame the wise. The cross of Christ is nothing to the world, but it is everything to us who are being saved.

**BIG IDEA: The Resurrection means Everything for Us.**

**APPLY:**

- **Challenge:** Speak to a fellow believer about the good reasons to believe in the cross and the Christian worldview.



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