

Sermon outline and notes prepared by:  
Pastor Stephen Felker  
[Swift Creek Baptist Church](#), 18510 Branders Bridge Rd., Colonial Heights, VA 23834  
1/28/07

## Matthew 27:32-40, 50-56 “Victorious Even in Death”

Intro. This text of Scripture tells us about the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. At first it was primarily a scene of unbelief. There were few believers in Christ present. The vast majority of people at the scene of the cross were unbelievers. They mocked Christ. They ridiculed His claim that He was the King of the Jews and the Son of God. They smugly assumed that His crucifixion was proof positive that He was not who He claimed to be.

Well, in certain segments of our society the voices of unbelief seem to be heard the most. Do you ever hear faith in Christ expressed in a positively light in TV programming or in the movies? Do you hear faith in Christ expressed by the professors or teachers in the secular classrooms of America? No, and in several fields of study the instruction most often promotes a humanistic world view that leaves little room for faith in God, and even less room for faith in Jesus as the Son of God. For the most part, faith in Christ is limited to inside the walls of our churches, and on religious programming. I read just the other day that pollster George Barna has concluded that only 8% of Americans have a fully evangelical Christian faith.

Unbelief in reference to Christ is a real problem. I believe unbelief is a barrier in one's relationship with God. And you can't have saving faith in God without believing in His Son Jesus Christ. Jesus said in John 5:23, "He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him." Jesus also said in John 5:22, "For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son." You had better settle in your mind who Jesus is, because you will stand before Him some day at the final judgment.

So who is Jesus? Many of His contemporaries refused to believe that He was the Son of God, King of the Jews. Jesus certainly didn't look the part of a king. He was dressed as a common man. Furthermore, Jesus didn't call for His followers to rescue Him when He was arrested & put on trial, or as He walked to road to Calvary. Then, when they crucified Him, they became even more sure that He was not God's Messiah. They viewed Jesus as utterly defeated at the cross. He seemed to be unable to save Himself.

But this morning I want to show you from my text of Scripture that Jesus Christ was victorious even in death. What happened at the Cross makes me believe all the more that He is Lord and Savior of the world. So consider with me how Jesus was victorious even in death. First of all:

### I. HIS TRUE IDENTIFY WAS AFFIRMED

I see that this occurred from several different sources. First:

A. By Pilate – When men were crucified, it was customary to post the charge against them over their head. So we read in v.37, "And they put up over His head the accusation written against Him: THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS." According to Jn. 19:19-22, it was Pilate, not the soldiers, who was responsible for the wording of this charge. In this case it was not just an accusation, but also a title. Now this made the Jewish leaders upset. They wanted it changed to something like, "He *said*, 'I am the king of the Jews.'" But since there was no real

crime for Pilate to put on the placard, he saw this as a marvelous opportunity to take a shot at the Jews, whom he despised. It was devastating to their pride to see this crucified man proclaimed as their King.

But what Pilate said in cynicism was in fact the truth. God overruled his actions for good. The whole point of the gospel of Matthew was to present Jesus as King. Indeed, He *was* the King of the Jews, even though most rejected their King and most Jews continue to reject their only hope of salvation.

Now I must acknowledge that Pilate's inscription alone would not prove anything about Jesus. However, in the sovereignty of God it was at least consistent with who Jesus really is. But we need more evidence, and our text provides it. For the identity of Jesus was also confirmed:

B. By Fulfilled Prophecy - According to Canon Liddon, there are 332 distinct Messianic prophecies in the OT that were literally fulfilled in Christ. The mathematical probability of 332 specific prophecies all coming to pass in one man is one in 84 with 100 zeroes after it. It would take a miracle for those odds to come to pass. Matthew specifically mentions one of these prophetic fulfillments in v.35, "Then they crucified Him, and divided His garments, casting lots, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet: 'They divided My garments among them, And for My clothing they cast lots.'" That was a quotation from Psa. 22:18. This was not a portion of Scripture that the soldiers knew or had any intention of fulfilling. Also, Matthew includes events and words which are found in other OT prophecies. For example, giving Jesus vinegar wine mingled with gall is mentioned in Psa. 69:21. The reference to the crowd wagging their heads at Jesus in v.39 is also found in Psa. 22:7 & 109:25. Their words in v.43 are found in Psa. 22:8. Also in Ps. 22, we read "They pierced my hands and feet." That prophecy describing crucifixion was written hundreds of years before crucifixion was practiced. The fact that so many detailed prophecies of Ps. 22 were fulfilled may explain why Jesus quoted from the opening verse of that Psalm, as we see in v.46. If we had time, I could give many other examples of fulfilled prophecies. How can you explain so many fulfilled prophecies if Jesus was not God's Messiah?

Finally, the identity of Jesus was also confirmed:

C. By the Centurion and the Soldiers – The centurion commanded about 100 men—he was a man of some significance in the ranks of Roman soldiers. He and the men under his command were given the unique responsibility of guarding Jesus Christ. We can assume their assignment began at the start of the trial before Pilate early that morning. The centurion had to be aware of the issues surrounding Jesus. He was certain to have heard the accusations of the Jewish leaders. He and his men heard people at the cross mock His claim not only to be a King, and even the Son of God. But at first it seemed that Jesus could hardly be a king, much less the Son of God. They either participated in or witnessed the abusive mocking of Jesus by the soldiers. And when they crucified Jesus, He seemed to be a pitiful sight.

But their opinion changed over the next several hours. Think with me what these men witnessed. They had seen how Jesus had been conducting Himself with grace and dignity in the midst of all the wicked taunts and mockeries. They heard Jesus forgive His foes, including the soldiers who had crucified them. They heard Him talk to God as though He were in fact His Heavenly Father. Then nature itself, which is generally indifferent to human suffering, responded to what happened to Jesus. The intense darkness for 3 hours must have had an impact upon them. Then amazingly, right after the death of Jesus, they felt the earth quake, and saw many rocks

split open. All of this made a deep impression upon the Centurion & his men. So, when all was over, he & his men had 2 reactions:

1. They Felt Fear & Conviction of Sin – Notice in the last of v.54 that “they feared greatly.” These men were tough, generally fearless in battle. But at this point they were shaking in their sandals! Of course the earthquake was probably enough to make them fear. But the main reason for their fear was connected to their second reaction:

2. They Believed in Jesus – They were heard to exclaim in v.54, “Truly this was the<sup>1</sup> Son of God!” After all that had happened, they were convinced that what they heard about Jesus was actually true. He was the Son of God. No wonder they “feared greatly.” What sent shudders through these soldiers was the fact that they had just crucified the Son of God! They were afraid that they had committed a great sin, and they might be under the judgment of God. Indeed, guilt puts fear in men’s hearts. Perhaps when they felt the earth quake and the rock split open they were afraid that the earth was about to swallow them up for what they had done. We can’t know for sure, but I believe that the centurion became a saved man. His fear indicates an awareness of his sin; his confession indicates salvation. So the centurion and at least some of his men were the first fruits among the vast army of Gentiles who have since made the same confession.

So it is clear to me that Jesus gained the victory on the cross by having His true identity confirmed by Pilate, by prophecy, and by the soldiers. Do you believe the Jesus is the anointed King of Israel? Do you believe that He is the Savior of the world? Do you believe that He is the Son of God? If so, say, “Amen.”

Furthermore, notice that the centurion was willing to confess his faith in Jesus, even among unbelievers. Have you been willing to confess your faith in Jesus publicly? Romans 10:9 says, “that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.” At the end of this message today I will give you the opportunity to make a public confession of your faith.

So far we have seen that Jesus was victorious at the cross by having His true identity confirmed. He was also victorious because:

## II. HIS GREAT LOVE WAS DEMONSTRATED

If Jesus is a king, then we would expect that He would rule over the hearts and lives of many people. At this time Jesus doesn’t rule by force, but by winning our hearts through love. As a result, He has won the loyalty & devotion of many hearts. Now there are several ways that Jesus demonstrated His love even in His suffering & death. I will limit myself to what Matthew mentions in our text. First:

A. In Simon of Cyrene – In v.32 we read that Simon had been compelled to bear the cross of Christ. Evidently, he stayed around and watched. The behavior of Jesus and His words from the cross left such an impression on Simon that he evidently became a Christian. How do we know that? Well Mark, in writing his gospel to the Romans, says that Simon was the father of Alexander and Rufus (Mark 15:21). It seems these two sons were well known Christians. Also, when Paul wrote the Romans, he said, “Greet Rufus” (Rom. 16:13). Somehow Christ had won over the heart of Simon of Cyrene even at the Cross.

---

<sup>1</sup> The original Greek does not have the definite article. However, the word order shows that there is emphasis on the *divinity* of Jesus in this statement. MacArthur has a length discussion on this topic (Matthew, p.109-110).

Furthermore, His great love was demonstrated:

B. By Staying on the Cross – Children and young people are perhaps more prone to be motivated by a dare. If someone says to you before others, “I dare you... I double dare you,” you are sorely tempted to just show them that you can do it. Well in v.40b the bypassers challenged Christ saying, “If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross.” In v.42 the religious leaders said, “He saved others; Himself He cannot save....” His mockers implied that it was weakness that kept Him there. It may have been very tempting to prove the mockers wrong, but Jesus refused to come down from that cross.

Why did He come down from the cross? It is not that He *could* not save Himself, but that He *would* not. He knew that He had to stay on the cross in order to save us from our sins. You see, if He saved Himself, then nobody else could be saved! He knew that He did not come to save His life, but to give it as a ransom for sinners. He wasn't thinking of Himself, but you. So it was the strength of His love for sinners that kept Him there. It is just because He did not come down from it that we believe on Him. In fact, it is because of what Jesus did for me on the cross that He is King of my life. Is He King of your life?

Finally, His great love was demonstrated:

C. In the Women Who Followed Him All the Way to the Cross – In vv.55-56 we read, “And many women who followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to Him, were there looking on from afar, among whom were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James [the Less] and Joses, and the mother of Zebedee's sons [Salome].” Having followed Him such a long journey as from Galilee to Jerusalem, eighty or a hundred miles, they resolved not to forsake Him now. Notice that Matthew states that *many* women followed Jesus to the cross. Some of these women, along with the Lord's mother and John, appear to have stood close to the cross at first. They were close enough for the Lord to speak to them according to John 19:25-27. But when John took the Lord's mother away from the scene to his own home, the other women seem to have withdrawn to some distance away, perhaps joining the other women who were standing at a distance. We can only speculate why they watched from a distance in the last hours.

What caused these women to follow Jesus all the way to Calvary? Surely it was their love for Him. And their love was surely a response to the Savior's great love for them. He was the magnet of their souls. He held them there as the sun holds the planets.

I believe that devoted loyalty is one of the most beautiful characteristics of godly women. Show me a godly woman, and I will show you a life marked by loyalty and faithfulness to Jesus. The women who watched Christ crucified didn't mind being identified with the crucified Christ.

My wife Cheryl is like that. She is a godly woman marked by love and devotion. She has followed me all through the years. As we were falling in love I asked her to transfer to Dallas Baptist College so we could be closer to each other. Then after we married she followed me to Minnesota to do mission work. Then she gladly followed me to Georgia the next 7 years. Then in love and devotion she left her parents and followed me to Virginia. What was most difficult was taking her 2 young children away from their grandparents. And in spite of many lonely nights she has never left me! I would say that is love and devotion, wouldn't you?

I am sorry to say that the women outdid the men in their love and devotion to the Savior. John was the only male disciple present at the cross. Joseph of Arimathea showed some courage on our Lord's behalf when he asked Pilate for the Lord's body (vv.57-58). But all the others had fled. But *several* women were faithful to the Lord all they way to the end, and some of these

same women were blessed with being the first witnesses of the empty tomb and the resurrection of our Lord.

Application: Do you not see the great love of Jesus at the Cross? His love won over Simon of Cyrene. His love for us was so strong that He stayed on the cross for us. And finally, His love was so strong that He drew some faithful women to follow Him all the way to the cross.

How have you responded to such love? Do you love Jesus? Have you demonstrated your love for Him with your faithful service and your faithful attendance in His church? Today is Men's Day in our church, and I want to challenge our men to show at least as much love and devotion to Jesus as our ladies. In this story the women were more loyal to Jesus, and more willing to openly identify with Him. Let us not repeat the mistake of the men who were His early disciples.

Now I want to bring out one more way that Jesus was victorious, even at the cross, and that is:

### III. HIS POWER OVER DEATH WAS DEMONSTRATED

Jesus said in the gospel of John that He was going to lay down His life for His sheep and no one could take it from Him (Jn. 10:17-18). Well I believe the text confirms that Jesus died voluntarily, at just the time He chose. In v.50 of our text we read, "And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit." What did Jesus say with a loud voice right before He died? First of all, the Gospel of John tells us that He shouted, "It is finished." That was no groan of a victim; that was a shout of triumph. It meant that the work of redemption was done. All things had been done which the Law of God required; all things fulfilled which prophecy predicted (cf. Jn. 19:29). The wages of sin were paid, and divine justice was satisfied. Also, there was nothing else to add. His redemption was complete. Knowing this, in Lk. 23:46 Jesus also said, "Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit." Then at that moment He *gave* His life. He chose to die. He did not die as a result of physical exhaustion but voluntarily. Usually death by crucifixion took 2-3 days. But the vitality of His last words, spoken with a loud voice, shows that Christ was in total control of His death. The voice of dying men is one of the first things that fails. Many can barely whisper at the time of their death. But Christ, just before He expired, spoke like a man in His full strength, to show that His life was not forced from Him, but was freely delivered by Him into His Father's hands, as His own act and deed. So He did not die when His body gave out, but when His work was finished and He chose to die.

I think that the time of His death was significant for another reason. That was the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, and the time when the paschal lamb was killed. Even so Christ our Passover was sacrificed for us and He offered Himself in the evening as a sacrifice to God.

Oh yes, Jesus Christ was victorious even in His death. Can't you see it? Don't you believe it?

Two infidels once sat on a railroad train discussing the life of Christ. One of them said, "I think an interesting romance could be written about him." The other replied, "And you are just the man to write it. Tear down the prevailing sentiment about His divinity, and paint Him as a man—a man among men." The suggestion was acted upon and the romance written. The man who made the suggestion was Colonel Robert G. Ingersoll, the noted atheist. The writer was General Lew Wallace, and the book was called *Ben Hur*.

In the process of constructing the life of Christ, Gen. Wallace found himself facing the greatest life ever lived on earth. And the more he studied, the more he was convinced Christ was more than man. Then one day, he was forced to cry, "Truly, this was the Son of God!"<sup>2</sup>

Conclusion: Christ has demonstrated that He is King of kings, and Lord of lords. He has demonstrated that He is the Son of God. Do you believe in Him? He has also demonstrated that He is the embodiment of love. In response to His great love, He is worthy of our total obedience. Is He lord of your life? Is there some area of your life that you have not surrendered to Him? If so, make it right today! Surrender your all to Jesus. He gave His all for you.

Sources: Stephen Felker, *Devotional & Explanatory Notes on the Entire Bible* (Col. Hghts, VA: Published by Author), 2006; William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973); Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1961 reprint); Fred W. Krummacher, *The Suffering Savior* (New York: Carter & Bros., 1855); John MacArthur, Jr., *Condemned and Crucified: Matthew 27:11-56* (Panorama City, CA: Word of Grace Communications, 1987); John MacArthur, Jr., *Crucifixion & Resurrection: Study Notes on John 18-20* (Panorama City, CA: Word of Grace Communications, 1986); J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 4 (Pasadena, CA: Thru The Bible Radio, 1983); John Phillips, *Exploring The Gospel of Matthew: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1999); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible [CD-ROM]* (Ontario: Timnathserah Inc., 1996); Dr. Jerry Vines *Great Events in the Life of Christ* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1979); Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Loyal: Matthew* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1980); Kenneth S. Wuest's *Word Studies From the Greek New Testament: Mark*, Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1950). Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

#### ABOUT THESE SERMON NOTES

© Dr. Stephen Felker. These notes may be used and even shared for personal study or ministry, but not for commercial purposes. The author credits the sources listed above for much of the content. Since Dr. Felker's sermons are preached without notes, the "live" recording of this sermon will be more completely in the author's own words. To obtain an audio recording of this message, you may send \$2 for each audio cassette tape or CD ordered, plus \$3 shipping & handling for each order mailed in. Up to 2 messages come on each cassette or CD. Make checks payable to Swift Creek Baptist Church, P.O. Box 235, Colonial Heights, VA 23834.

---

<sup>2</sup> Paul Lee Tan, *Jesus Is Coming: 500 Illustrations: #107* (Rockville, Maryland: Assurance Publishers, 1978), 41-42.