

## *Humanity at the Cross*

*By*

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There's an old saying that the ground at the foot of the cross is level. I didn't want this to become an Easter message, although it's hard for it not to fit into that category. Instead, I was mulling over all the characters that were present during the crucifixion. Every Good Friday service-goer knows Jesus hung on the cross from nine to three. But seldom do we read what those actually present said or did. We may hear about the soldiers, the two thieves, or how Jesus talked to John, giving him the care of His mother; but rarely do we look at all the immediate spectators who actually saw the crucifixion.

I know this is going to sound strange to many of you who are Christians, but there are folks who do not know that Jesus Christ was an actual person who lived from about 6 to 4 BC to about 30 or 33 AD, depending upon whose math you prefer.<sup>1</sup> Probably because we do have actual historic records that confirm He lived, even atheists concede He walked our green earth. We also have records that confirm some of the special events that took place during His life.<sup>2</sup>

What I want to do is limit this viewing to only the time period that they crucified Jesus, as opposed to the triumphant entry we celebrate as Palm Sunday, the events at the Garden of Gethsemane or His torture by the soldiers. Remember that I'm not looking for this to be an Easter message, per se. Also, we don't know exactly how many could see the crucifixion. There are always different opinions on the subject. I'm

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<sup>1</sup>< [https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chronology\\_of\\_Jesus](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chronology_of_Jesus) > I know many do not care for Wikipedia. I take a more pragmatic view. When I know their information is pretty good, I will source them.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. This is one of the best theses I've read on this topic of the supernatural events surrounding the crucifixion < [https://www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/48/48-2/48-2-pp301-316\\_JETS.pdf](https://www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/48/48-2/48-2-pp301-316_JETS.pdf) >

going to err on the side of caution and say that many could see it, even from afar, as some of the writers mention.

### *From the Hall to Golgotha*

**Matthew 27:31-34:** “And after that they had mocked him, they took the robe off from him, and put his own raiment on him, and led him away to crucify him. And as they came out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name: him they compelled to bear his cross. And when they were come unto a place called Golgotha, that is to say, a place of a skull, They gave him vinegar to drink mingled with gall: and when he had tasted thereof, he would not drink.”

**Mark 15:21-23:** “And they compel one Simon a Cyrenian, who passed by, coming out of the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to bear his cross. And they bring him unto the place Golgotha, which is, being interpreted, The place of a skull. And they gave him to drink wine mingled with myrrh: but he received it not.”

**Luke 23:26-32:** “And as they led him away, they laid hold upon one Simon, a Cyrenian, coming out of the country, and on him they laid the cross, that he might bear it after Jesus. And there followed him a great company of people, and of women, which also bewailed and lamented him. But Jesus turning unto them said, Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children. For, behold, the days are coming, in the which they shall say, Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare, and the paps which never gave suck. Then shall they begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us; and to the hills, Cover us. For if they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry? And there were also two other, malefactors, led with him to be put to death.”

### *The Crucifixion*

**Matthew 27:35-50:** “And they crucified him, and parted his garments, casting lots: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet,

‘They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture did they cast lots.’ And sitting down they watched him there; And set up over his head his accusation written, THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS. Then were there two thieves crucified with him, one on the right hand, and another on the left. And they that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads, And saying, Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross.

“Likewise also the chief priests mocking him, with the scribes and elders, said, He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him. He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God. The thieves also, which were crucified with him, cast the same in his teeth. Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour. And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? That is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Some of them that stood there, when they heard that, said, This man calleth for Elias. And straightway one of them ran, and took a sponge, and filled it with vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink. The rest said, Let be, let us see whether Elias will come to save him. Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost.”

**Luke 23:33-46:** “And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left. Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. And they parted his raiment, and cast lots. And the people stood beholding. And the rulers also with them derided him, saying, He saved others; let him save himself, if he be Christ, the chosen of God. And the soldiers also mocked him, coming to him, and offering him vinegar, And saying, If thou be the king of the Jews, save thyself. And a superscription also was written over him in letters of Greek, and Latin, and Hebrew, THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.

“And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us. But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss. And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise. And it was about the sixth hour, and there was a darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour. And the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was rent in the midst. And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost.”

**John 19:16-30:** “Then delivered he him therefore unto them to be crucified. And they took Jesus, and led him away. And he bearing his cross went forth into a place called the place of a skull, which is called in the Hebrew Golgotha: Where they crucified him, and two other with him, on either side one, and Jesus in the midst. And Pilate wrote a title, and put it on the cross. And the writing was JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS. This title then read many of the Jews: for the place where Jesus was crucified was nigh to the city: and it was written in Hebrew, and Greek, and Latin. Then said the chief priests of the Jews to Pilate, Write not, The King of the Jews; but that he said, I am King of the Jews. Pilate answered, What I have written I have written. Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took his garments, and made four parts, to every soldier a part; and also his coat: now the coat was without seam, woven from the top throughout. They said therefore among themselves, Let us not rend it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be: that the scripture might be fulfilled, which saith, They parted my raiment among them, and for my vesture they did cast lots. These things therefore the soldiers did.

“Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother, and his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son! Then saith he to the

disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home. After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst. Now there was set a vessel full of vinegar: and they filled a sponge with vinegar, and put it upon hyssop, and put it to his mouth. When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost.”

### *The Immediate Aftermath*

**Matthew 27:51-56:** “And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent; And the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, And came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many. Now when the centurion, and they that were with him, watching Jesus, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God. And many women were there beholding afar off, which followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering unto him: Among which was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of Zebedees children.”

**Mark 15:40-41:** “There were also women looking on afar off: among whom was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the less and of Joses, and Salome; (Who also, when he was in Galilee, followed him, and ministered unto him;) and many other women which came up with him unto Jerusalem.”

**Luke 23:47-49:** “Now when the centurion saw what was done, he glorified God, saying, Certainly this was a righteous man. And all the people that came together to that sight, beholding the things which were done, smote their breasts, and returned. And all his acquaintance, and the women that followed him from Galilee, stood afar off, beholding these things.”

**John 19:31-37:** “The Jews therefore, because it was the preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the sabbath day, (for that sabbath day was an high day,) besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away. Then came the soldiers, and brake the legs of the first, and of the other which was crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus, and saw that he was dead already, they brake not his legs: But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water. And he that saw it bare record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe. For these things were done, that the scripture should be fulfilled, A bone of him shall not be broken. And again another scripture saith, They shall look on him whom they pierced.”

### *Some Differences*

I haven't written what all four Gospels have laid out surrounding Christ's passion, just the differences. You will notice that it seems Luke places the tearing of the veil before Jesus' death, while the others do not. I'm not going to comment on differences between the Gospels. If I do that this article can become a book. What I did want to do is make sure all the people that seemed to be at the cross were mentioned. You will also notice that John's gospel adds information the others do not have. I kept that information in the chronology.

There is another person who does not seem to be at the cross, and that is Joseph of Arimathaea. He is the one who went to Pilate to ask for Jesus' body. He gave Jesus his own tomb for burial. Joseph thought it was forever, not knowing how short a period of time it would be. There is no specific language which places him exactly at the cross. It's hard to imagine he wasn't there, but there are those who don't think he was.

Again, I don't want to get into differences of opinion as much as I want to look at the different groups of people there. Joseph definitely fits into the group of people who agreed with Jesus, probably believing He was the Messiah. We know after he spoke to Pilate that Luke records he took the body of Jesus down from the cross himself. Mark seems to record

the soldiers did so. John mentions Nicodemus as taking the body with Joseph for burial. Again, for me these differences or additions are not central to the topic of the article.

For those who read these differences as a problem with the accuracy of the text, let me share some archaeological insight. In the 1980s they found the remnants of a crucified man. Rome's practice was to have the condemned carry the crossbar of the cross and not the pole itself. In Jerusalem this would be even more important due to the lack of wood. They reused all portions, but left the poles at the site. Moreover, dead bodies were Rome's property. In the case of Jerusalem, Golgotha was a place where dead bodies were thrown. Here is where both accounts in the Gospel can very well be correct. The Roman soldiers would remove the crossbar with the dead body from the pole, leaving it for loved ones to collect the body off of the crossbar on the ground. If no one was there to collect the condemned, the soldiers would dispose of the body because they needed the wooden crossbar for the next crucifixion.

### *The People*

What I want to do is group people by categories. Somewhat by order of appearance, we have soldiers, everyday citizens or passersby, leaders, fellow prisoners (the two thieves), relatives of Jesus, disciple-followers and mockers. I realize there is some overlap between leaders like, say, the priests, who mocked Jesus and everyday citizens who were also mockers. We have one thief who mocked and one who seemed to be a believer before his death. So this is not a scientific analysis. It's just my observation from the text.

While I'm going to separate these into groups of people, I want us to see some commonalities. People get involved in activities to accomplish certain goals. Folks do things to either maximize their prestige, reputation, influence, leisure or enjoyment. Under the enjoyment category, I'm going to place love. Sometimes you do or don't do a thing out of love and respect for an individual and/or concept.

## *Soldiers*

They come in all shapes and sizes. Roman soldiers were usually beefy. Coming up in a system where brute force ruled the day, they weren't usually chatty and easy going. Patience and quiet reflexion wasn't their daily chore. Rome didn't need it to be. Rome wanted them as enforcers. They were there under Rome's command. While Rome could tell them *what* to do, Rome could not tell them what to *think*. When a soldier gave or received a command, it was obeyed quickly or expected to be done so. Roman law allowed civilians to be conscripted for a certain period of time or distance; hence, Simon's role in carrying Jesus' cross. So it behooved Simon to obey the soldier quickly.

Soldiers were there to maximize their job security and status for advancement, though crowd control and crucifixions weren't favorite jobs. From the text we know some of the soldiers were cruel, others greedy, dividing his garment. We know some were there just to obey orders, like the ones sent to break the condemn's legs. I'm going to write this sarcastically: We have one go-getter who decided a spear in the side would make sure the condemned would not get back up from the dead!

Yet, there is one soldier where the gospel writers reveal his thoughts. It also seems to be the thoughts of others as well. Both Matthew and Luke record him as a centurion who says, "Now when the centurion saw what was done, he glorified God, saying, Certainly this was a righteous man." Matthew gives us a little more insight into the mind of a soldier. Remember, these men were acquainted with wielding power and seeing it displayed by the leaders around them.

I've always leaned to the sight and display of power that God unleashed during Jesus' death that makes these men—tarnished by the display of power—acknowledge what they're seeing is divinity in action. Trying to crowd-control people coming up from their graves couldn't have been easy: "And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent; And the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose,



And came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many. Now when the centurion, and they that were with him, watching Jesus, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God.”

The reality is some people will not accept Jesus until they see power displayed.<sup>3</sup> I think in some small part that’s what will be going on with the last days’ ingathering-revival. The power unleashed by the hand of God in preaching the Gospel will be needed to convince them.

### *Everyday passersby*

This is a group I think we can all identify with. You’re on your way, minding your own business trying to get to work— or, as in Simon Cyrene’s case, possibly returning from an event with your children— when a gruff soldier points a gun in your face and says, “pick up his crossbar.” Stunned, you’ve got to do it because the government has a ‘policy.’ This was Rome’s world and Simon, the Cyrene’s cross for the day. As citizens, we can all identify with that, especially during tax season.

Did he remain at the foot of the cross? We don’t know. It seems there is no mention of him in early church documents. Some say he is listed in an apocryphal account. Most scholars attribute that mention to a different Simon. What is of note is the mention of his sons. It’s hard to imagine that he didn’t become a believer since Mark records the names of his sons. It’s widely believed that Peter dictated Mark’s gospel account to him. By the time of its writing, they knew their names. There is some scholarly belief that the sons became leaders within the early church.

Nevertheless, we don’t know how old the sons were. Imagine children at Christ’s cross. It’s not something we think of often. Simon had to have

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<sup>3</sup> This is one of the best theses I’ve read on this topic of the supernatural events surrounding the crucifixion < [https://www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/48/48-2/48-2-pp301-316\\_JETS.pdf](https://www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/48/48-2/48-2-pp301-316_JETS.pdf) >

the look of a mature, not elderly man. I say that because for Rome crucifixions were all theatre. They were done to display strength and a warning: Don't mess with our laws or this will happen to YOU! That's why I think there were more who could see this crucifixion, even if they weren't at the foot of the pole. They were conducted in easily viewed public places.

Golgotha was a twofer for the Romans: a Jewish approved garbage dump for the dead bodies and a very public area sending a message for obedience. If the prisoners collapsed and died on the way to the "event" that would not do. So they conscripted Simon. Now, there are those that believe he was chosen for his skin color and this is what made him stand out. I don't doubt that something made Simon stand out. Among a sea of olive-skinned faces, a dark one from the African area of Cyrene would fit that bill. Could it simply have been his proximity to Jesus instead? Sure, and then again, it may have been a combination of all of the above.

We have to remember that there was a march on the way to the top of Golgotha. The crowds on the streets contained many people; passersby, if you will. We know they consisted of woman because we have a record of Jesus prophesying to them on the way. There were probably merchants, shoppers and those like Simon with his two children in tow, going to and fro. Many have the opinion that his children weren't at the cross, but that they were part of the early church. They gave their father's story— or Simon did himself— to those who would record. But, there are just as many who believe the children did accompany their dad.

Whatever your opinion, put yourself in the shoes of the everyday citizen. You're minding your own business when government comes crashing down on you, either messing up your day or your year or your life. Many of you in lock-down states know what I mean. To add travesty to suffocation, if you don't keep your head down, or if you stand out in any way, shape or form, you will be pulled from the crowd and demanded or conscripted— as Simon Cyrene was— to do something you don't want to do. For those of you who may be older, you will remember that here in America we hold dear freedom of religion, speech and the press. We

hold dear privacy rights and rights of association. Not so in the Jerusalem of the New Testament. Believe it or not, in many ways it was better than today's socialistic and communistic states.

In fact, I will venture to say that from a young age Simon, as well as his children, would have learned the hard and fast rule: DON'T STAND OUT AND NEVER TELL ANYONE WHAT YOU THINK. Unfortunately, in the bastion of the free world, communism and socialism has awakened in the theories of Critical Race Theory, ESG rules, Climate Change Theory and Gender Ideology. They're trying to force all of the above down the throats of your five-year olds and older school children. If you tell or show anyone the error of these ideas and their adherence to a squashing of free speech, religion and privacy, they will attempt to cancel you. Heck, the FBI tried to do this to parents who spoke out about demands to control their children.<sup>4</sup> Today's groups are euphemistically called cancel culture; but what it really is, is an attempt to infiltrate and overtake the free world with communism. It doesn't take long for a society that puts up with political trials, indictments and arrests to go from freedom to a full-blown meltdown of liberty that takes us straight into captivity.

This is where the Jews of Jerusalem were when Jesus dragged the crossbar through the street. They were in captivity to Rome and Jesus was a captive citizen. Try to place yourself in the shoes of merchants, shoppers, women, men, parents, leaders— and yes, even soldiers— on the road to Golgotha. They are all somewhat frightened people unwilling to speak their real minds; decidedly trying to hide their uniqueness, which would cause them to stand out for unwanted attention. Even the soldiers who may have been conscripted would, out of fear, wield an overabundance of force to stay alive in an effort to succeed.

And yet, we do have a record of passersby and onlookers all realizing that what they are seeing is no ordinary man dying. Just as with the

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<sup>4</sup> < <https://nypost.com/2021/10/21/wh-aided-school-board-groups-letter-before-garland-sicced-fbi-on-parents> >< <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/restoring-america/fairness-justice/fbi-opened-multiple-investigations-into-protesting-parents-gop-lawmakers-say> >

soldiers, we see the supernatural events and earthquakes also shaking these folks in a place that only God can move us. Luke records it this way: “And all the people that came together to that sight, beholding the things which were done, smote their breasts, and returned.” Frankly, I’d prefer the Lord not resort to the heavy hand. I’d rather just do what He asks. The easy way isn’t always easy. We have to ask ourselves, in our everyday lives as we pass by situations, are we going to do it God’s way or our own way? It may not be an easy question, but it’s one we do need to answer.

### *Leaders*

We know there had to be two sorts of leaders: good and bad. Why do I say that? Because in every society there are two kinds of leaders. The first will do everything they can to promote and help society; and the second are those who will do whatever it takes to gain promotion and aggrandizement. I’m not trying to be overly simplistic. I realize socialists think their form of government is good, and therefore by implementing said ideology, they are doing good. Unfortunately, either they unwittingly believe a lie, or they know better. Any sincere study of socialism will reveal its trap and lie.

In our encapsulated view of the crucifixion scene, we see the bad leaders as mockers. We see a group that I really can’t define as good or bad, though I tend to think they were bad. That’s because we don’t hear of them mocking Jesus. What we find out is that they went to Pilate to ask that this whole bloody ordeal be hurried up because it’s getting to be a high holy holiday and they can’t have this mess going on. So they ask Pilate to break the legs of the condemned. Again, remember what I said about good and bad leaders. These guys, in my opinion, are trying to do the “Lord’s” work by following *their idea* of the Law of Moses. Well, if you’ve spent any amount of time reading the Old Testament, you know that they are not doing our Lord’s work. In my opinion, their motivation is prestige, reputation and influence. I could add leisure, if in fact, they want to get this done so they can enjoy some time off on a holiday. Not my definition of good leaders.

Except for known leaders like Joseph of Arimathaea and Nicodemus, we really don't know how many leaders believed in Jesus. We do have Luke's description of "all the people that came together to that sight, beholding the things which were done, smote their breasts, and returned." Are some of the Pharisees, scribes, elders, rulers or priests included in this group? We know they were mockers because Matthew writes this: "And the rulers also with them derided him, saying, He saved others; let him save himself, if he be Christ, the chosen of God." Luke records them this way: "And the rulers also with them derided him, saying, He saved others; let him save himself, if he be Christ, the chosen of God."

It's unlikely that many of the rulers, priests, elders or scribes expressed a desire for belief. John records the chief priests this way: "Then said the chief priests of the Jews to Pilate, Write not, The King of the Jews; but that he said, I am King of the Jews. Pilate answered, What I have written I have written." It's possible we could tweak out a leader here or there as someone who believed, but the same motives that made them leaders, it seems, also had the potential to make them unbelievers as well. That is a lesson for us all. What motives do we have at our jobs, homes and relationships? What's our motive even when fulfilling our calling?

Important questions some folks never ask. I find people like this frequently. I've discovered I can't do much when sharing whatever word I might be carrying for them. I always have to obey the Lord in sharing that word, but seldomly is it received for what it is: My meager attempt to do what Jesus tells me to do in allowing His word to captivate their hearts. I used to blame myself for this. As I got older I realized it really isn't about me. It really is about Jesus invading their lives and exposing their motives, while sharing His love and protection for them. I've also had to remember that we are fellow travelers on the same journey home. In that way, I'm able to release them to the Lord: forgive those I must, and pray for others; let go and let God.

*Fellow prisoners*

These two easily fall into two categories. A believer and an unbeliever. The unbeliever becomes a mocker. But both men have an opportunity to change their eternal lives. They are on death's door. At that moment, unlike Jesus, they have no hope for resurrection. What kind of life have they led to bring them to this point? This is Rome's electric chair or final needle; whatever you want to call a death penalty. Their desire for prestige, reputation, influence, leisure or enjoyment has caused them to steal for a living. Lying, influence peddling, bribery, possibly murder or thievery are not too far of a potential stretch for these men.

The thief who realizes the mistakes he's made in life choices, makes it very clear that they deserve the sentence they are receiving. But he recognizes something in Jesus that tells him Jesus does not. In fact, he goes to a place that's absolutely stunning. I'm not sure I could have done that. When you realize the hell the human body goes through in a Roman crucifixion, you realize that being in a coma would not be impossible. In fact, this is why the soldiers call for someone to carry Jesus' cross.

I'm not going to belabor the physical torture; but imagine what kind of state of mind you'd be in after having nails driven through your body and being beaten to a pulp. So much so, it's prophesied that Jesus' back was plowed like a row crop (Psalm 129:3). Scripture says His face was so bad, it was hard to recognize him as human (Isaiah 53:2-10). Crucifixion has to be the worst form of death; it was absolutely hideous. Yet, even in this environment, this man, who has probably spent his entire life as a thief, has a moment of clarity and recognizes the King hanging next to him. Here's Luke's retelling what he asks Jesus: "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise." Amazing; it's simply amazing. It really does remind me of the words of some of my former pastors: "Never write anyone off. You never know what God can do with them." Those are words as gems for our instruction.

## *Mockers*

We go from amazing to the ridiculous. Why revile a dying man? Really; why waste your time doing such a thing? Unfortunately, we have a long list of people in this case. We have everyday people, our passersby; we have one thief, and we have many rulers, priests, elders, soldiers and the like. In fact, as I have mentioned before, it seems most of the rulers did mock him. There is no record of them repenting, either. I'd call some of them Looky-Loo's or Lookie-Loo's.

Believe it or not, our modern terms have two different definitions and thus two different spellings. If it's with a 'y' you're talking about someone who sees a car wreck and stops to look or rubbernecks to stare on the highway. If you spell it with an 'ie' then you're more like a shopper who has no intention of buying, but just takes up everybody's time by wasting space. I honestly couldn't categorize these mockers. Here's a portion of scripture we find them in: "Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour. And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? That is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Some of them that stood there, when they heard that, said, This man calleth for Elias. And straightway one of them ran, and took a sponge, and filled it with vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink. *The rest said, Let be, let us see whether Elias will come to save him.* Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost" (Matthew 27:45-50).

Do you see what I mean? For sure they're onlookers desiring to watch a train wreck. But aren't they also shills for the devil, pretending that they're interested in the things of God, but having no belief whatsoever that a miracle can happen? I did have a question as to which spelling to use. I would have opted for the rubberneckers, but these folks really did puzzle me. It's almost like they have no fear of God at all. Nobody fears the shop owner if you take up space to enjoy the art of shopping, do they? And that's my point with mockers; it seems they have absolutely no fear of God. But here is something that can encourage us. While the

rulers, soldiers and passersby are included in this group, Luke does say this: “And *all* the people that came together to that sight, beholding the things which were done, smote their breasts, and returned.”

Now what Luke doesn't say is that they all repented. Nevertheless, he does say all smote their breasts, and returned. There are quite a few translations and commentaries that view the Greek here as including all those who may even have been his mockers. The prevailing opinion from these sources is that after having seen the signs and wonders around them take place, they had a change of mind and heart concerning Jesus. In fact, I could not find one commentary or extended translation that didn't include that opinion. The moral of that story is, don't be too harsh on the diehard mocker. You never know what God does that will move them to see truth and repent. Isn't that what Christianity is all about? A second chance, even for those who don't deserve one.

### *Followers, Friends and Family*

This is a big group, though not the normal twelve we might expect to see. Isn't that the case when trouble shows up on our doorsteps? We lean on family, but sometimes friends we wouldn't expect show up instead. It's not that family didn't try, maybe distance separates or other crises. But this is the group where we see their motive based on love and a belief that Jesus was who He said He was.

We're told by various writers that they were women looking on afar off: Among whom was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the less and of Joses, and Salome; and many other women which came up with him to Jerusalem. And all his acquaintance, and many women were there beholding afar off, which followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to him: Among which was the mother of Zebedee's children. And we know both John and Jesus' mother were there as well.

This is an amazing list because we know both men and women acquaintances were there, but more women seem to be mentioned. That is unlike any ancient text. Normally, women are not prominent in a story.



That's what makes the Bible so unique, and what made Jesus unique as well. The Bible's accounts are not like many ancient texts in that we see stories of the lowly as well as the mighty retold: Women, children, fathers, aunts, uncles, all with a story. It's as if God wants us to know there is no human so weak, no person so strong that doesn't merit His attention. The King of the Universe cares for us all.

Jesus didn't neglect the strong, those of high birth, the weak or the lowly, either, as He traveled this earth. We know that as a man, Jesus needed the support of acquaintances, friends and family, all alike. Whenever I look at large ministries I'm always struck by how many hands it takes to do the work. Sometimes I don't think we realize that without all the help Jesus received from those who loved him and believed in who He was, He never would have made it to the cross. We get this idea that living the three plus years of ministry was the hard part, but going to the cross was like a wave that swept Him up. Yet the reality is, without His family, friends, followers and even acquaintances, He never would have made it to the cross.

In our PC version of Jesus on the cross he is covered. Unfortunately, it is more likely that he was naked. I understand why we cover Him; I'm glad we do. But as we age, reality is something we need. Not one of the writers says the women were up close and personal. We know for a fact Mary and John were at the foot of the cross. Otherwise, the writers all use the words *from afar off*. They didn't need to be standing right next to the beams of wood. They knew Him closely, even from afar. Because of their love for Him, they could't stand to see it, but because of their love for Him, they could't leave. There is one more aspect of love that explains their ability to remain watching the crucifixion.

The last few years I've had Jesus share how much He loves US.... Yes, humanity. It's not about our love for Him, but it's all about His love for us. We don't quite understand God's love. The love of the God of the Bible is not something that's easy for mankind to understand or accept. But these people did. These that knew Him best while He walked the earth knew His love so deeply that it compelled them to the cross. It

compelled them to accomplish whatever that task looked like, even if there was nothing to do but stand there, cry and pray. They didn't deny Him. They didn't deny they knew Him. They didn't deny whatever need He may have had, even to the very end; even until His body was securely in the borrowed grave. Yet there was one more thought of love.

For three and a half years they watched Him do the most amazing miracles. Some watched and others knew He had even raised the dead. Could it be that this man, this Messiah could even do the impossible and not die? Could He get up even from this horror they were witnessing? We even hear the suspicion of it in the voices of the mockers. Remember what the devil incites them to say? He saved others, but Himself? Could it be that even though these human mockers, knowing nothing about God's love, suspected that divinity might not let Him die? The difference between those who believed and loved, and knew His love— and the mockers— is that even if He doesn't come down from the cross, they will still believe in Him.

When we know His love today, it really does compel us to do whatever He needs. Even if it's just to be and sit and pray. Many of you know what that's like. If you've ever been in a hospital or nursing facility, you know what it's like to have someone there. Just their presence alone brings comfort. Our lives' journeys are all like that. And that is part of the compelling aspect of God's love. Just knowing He is there brings a comfort, even though you can't feel His hands or sense His presence. He is the one that says He will never leave us nor forsake us, even to the end of the age (Matthew 28:20; John 14:18; Hebrews 13:5).

Those who believe and love: His family, friends and followers, leave the cross that day questioning, but still believing. There's not much difference between all the various characters who show up in this story of the crucifixion as they walk away. Even our screen shot of those who love and believe leave the site sad, confused and questioning. But there is a difference in their futures. To have been impacted by Jesus for those three and a half years means their faith and belief was tested in ways it may not have been for anyone else there that day.

It also means they are one step ahead of those who come to faith in Him that day. Why, you might ask? The testing of their faith that day will strengthen them in ways the younger believers have not yet experienced. There is a reason why wine ages differently and why that age makes it expensive. Those who believed in Him before they got to the cross that day were already that much farther along in faith. They needed to be in order to maintain a new movement where the younger believers needed to go. We know they did amazing things after Jesus ascended. In fact, they still are doing and seeing the miraculous.

### *The Level Ground*

It's so poignant that saying, that the ground at the cross is level. There is a reason why. We all, friends, family, unbelievers, soldiers, leaders, everyone has to make their journey to that reality of Christ on the cross. All the pressing questions need answering: Was it some kind of sham? Is it truly the only answer for sin to be paid for? Is it really the only way to heaven? We all have to answer the same questions. When we do, we all begin a journey to the same destination.

Jesus said it best: "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul" (Matthew 16:24-26)?

If you believe in your heart and confess with your mouth that God raised Jesus from the dead you will be saved (Romans 10:9). It is that simple. If you need someone to make that confession to, hit the 'Contact' link on this site and we will pray with you. If you need a Bible, let us know.

Believe it or not, I really don't want to make this an Easter story. I believe we need to make this an everyday reality. 'There is a King' is the title of the song I'd like to share as my everyday reality, whether I'm

upset, busy, resting or enjoying life. By way of caveat, I do not know these people and have no specific permission to share except this song is on a public platform: Elevation Worship: “There Is A King” sung by Chris Brown: < <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=-h-NCaXwQ0s> >