

Notes abridged from "Saint Matthew" by J.C.Fenton - Pelican Gospel Commentaries

## Chapter 27 .45 - 66 (The events of Friday afternoon and Saturday)

### Chapter 27 .45 - 50 (= Mark 15 .33 - 41) **Jesus dies**

The Gospel writers aren't overly explicit about Jesus' suffering on the cross. Artists and hymn writers down the ages have done so. Instead the Gospels use allusions to Jewish Scripture to emphasise the meaning of the crucifixion. In Matthew the only words of Jesus from the cross are from Psalm 22 "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (27 .46)

- verse 45 - For Mark's darkness "*over all the world*", Matthew has "*over all the land*" possibly in line with Exodus 10 .22 "*there was thick darkness over all the land of Egypt for three days*". There was an expectation that the "last days" would be like the last days in Egypt. However see also Amos 8 .9 "*And on that day .... I will make the sun go down at noon, and darken the earth in broad daylight*".
- verse 46 - The words of Jesus are from Ps 22 .1. Mark has *Eloi, Eloi* (Aramaic) and Matthew has *Eli, Eli* (Hebrew). This Psalm is also quoted at 27 .35,39 and 43. When Jesus accepted the will of God (26 .36-46) it was described as a *cup* of suffering, *foretold in scripture*. One of those scriptures was Ps 22. The only words of Jesus from the cross are from that psalm and heighten the sense of being abandoned by God in the face of hostile powers.
- verse 47 - According to 2 Kings 2 .9-12 Elijah didn't die but was taken into heaven alive. from where he would return to help those in distress. The bystanders mishear the cries of Jesus.
- verse 48 - Reference to Ps 69 .21 "*and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink*". See 27.34 for the use of another verse of this Psalm.
- verse 49 - Matthew portrays two people; one giving the wine, the other saying "*wait ...*" In Mark the same person does both.
- verse 50 - To emphasise Jesus voluntarily and actively surrendered his life to God, Matthew has "*yielded up his spirit*", instead of Mark's "*breathed his last*".

### Chapter 27 .51 - 54 (= Mark 15 .38, 39) **The signs after Jesus' death**

From this point on Matthew adds much additional material to Mark. Mark has two signs; the tearing of the curtain in the temple and the words of the centurion. The former to show the old order was ending, the latter to show an outsider finally recognising who Jesus was. Matthew adds: an earthquake, opening of tombs, resurrection of the saints and their appearing to many after the resurrection. These are legendary events used by Matthew to show the death of Jesus as an act of God, endorsed by God in earthquake and splitting rocks. The effect of the death will be new life for the dead, Jesus is "*the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep*" (1 Cor 15 .20)

- verse - 51 "*the curtain of the temple*". This is the inner curtain that is torn. It obscured the "Holy of Holies", where God was believed to be present, from view of people. Now people can approach God in a new way. This is interpreted in Hebrews 10 .19f.  
*"the earth shook, and the rocks were split"*. God is depicted at work in earthquakes at, among others, Judges 5.4, 2 Sam 22.8, Ps 68.8. An earthquake and breaking of rocks are also at 1 Kings 19.11.

For a non-scriptural source the Jewish historian Josephus records similar signs before the destruction of the temple in AD 70 (The Jewish War VI 5,3)

verse 52f - "*the saints*" are the holy from Israel's past. They don't leave their graves until after the resurrection of Christ who is "*the first fruits*". Matthew is using Christian faith in the Resurrection to illustrate his account.

verse 54 - Matthew adds "*and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus*". See the notes on v36 (Week 4) for Matthew emphasising a watch was kept. Mark's "*and he saw that he breathed his last*" is changed to "*saw the earthquake and what took place, and were filled with awe*". The emphasis is on what the death means.

"*Truly this was a son of God!*" or "*the Son of God*". The centurion and soldiers act as mouthpieces for later Christians and confess their faith.

### Chapter 27 .55, 56 (= Mark 15 .40, 41) **The women**

The disciples fled after the arrest and even Peter is not heard of again in Chapter 27 after the denials. Mark, Matthew and Luke all depict the witnesses of the crucifixion as the women who had followed Jesus from Galilee. They see his burial, they come to the tomb on the Sunday morning and find it empty, and they meet Jesus.

verse 55 - "*There were also many women there*". Some are named in v56. Matthew mentions them as they link the crucifixion and burial with the resurrection. "*looking on from afar*" is Ps 38.11 "*my kinsmen stand afar off*". Luke uses this too, "*And all his acquaintances .... stood at a distance*" (Luke 23.49).

verse 56 - "*Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joseph*". They are mentioned again at 27.61 and 28.1 linking death, burial and resurrection. Mark has "*of James the younger and Jose*". Matthew says in 13.55 that two of Jesus' brothers were James and Joseph but, if the second Mary is (as in John) Jesus' mother, Matthew doesn't say so.

"*the mother of the sons of Zebedee*" is mentioned at 20.20. Mark has *Salome* here.

### Chapter 27 .57 - 61 (= Mark 15 .42 - 47) **The burial of Jesus**

As dead bodies were regarded as unclean it was important that of Jesus should be removed before nightfall, the start of the sabbath. This was especially so with bodies of the executed as "*If a man has committed a crime punishable by death, and you hang him on a tree, his body shall not remain all night on the tree, but you shall bury him the same day, for a hanged man is accursed by God*" (Deuteronomy 21.22ff). A hitherto unknown disciple, *Joseph of Arimathea*, steps forward, obtains permission from Pilate, and buries Jesus in his own unused tomb. The two Mary's are sitting opposite and identify the tomb for return on the Sunday.

verse 57 - "*When it was evening*". The meaning is *before sunset* as, if sunset had already occurred it was the sabbath and no work could be done, especially handling a dead body. The historian Josephus again "*The Jews pay so much regard to obsequies that even those found guilty and crucified are taken down and buried before sunset*" (The Jewish War IV 5,2) "*A rich man*". Matthew adds "*a rich man*" to Mark's "*respected man of the council*" to allude to Isaiah "*and they made (the servants of the Lord's) grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death*" (Isa 53.9)

- verse 58 - Matthew omits Mark 15.44, Pilate's inquiry with the centurion as to whether Jesus was dead.
- verse 59f - Matthew adds "*clean*", "*his own new*" and "*great*".
- verse 61 - Mark has "*saw where he was laid*" and Matthew has "*were there, sitting opposite the sepulchre*". Like the guards sitting at the crucifixion (27.36) the women make certain that there was no mistake about the identity and the place; it is Jesus who was crucified, dead, buried, and who will be raised up at the third day.

### Chapter 27 .62 - 66

### *The tomb is guarded*

Matthew has already shown his concern that people should not be able to say there had been deception. No one could have removed Jesus from the cross before death, because the Roman soldiers were guarding him (vv36,54). Here he adds a whole new paragraph explaining how a watch was kept during the sabbath, and why it was done. Jesus had said he would be raised after three days, so his disciples may try and hide the body. But the sealing and guarding of the tomb will prove even more that Jesus is raised by God, not removed by the disciples.

There is no parallel to this paragraph in the other Gospels.

- verse 62 - "*Next day, that is, after the day of Preparation*" This is the Sabbath. It's a strange expression but the word *Preparation* is used in Mark earlier, but omitted by Matthew at 27.57. He includes it here instead.
- verse 63f - The words *imposter* and *fraud* come from the same Greek root. Therefore "*the last fraud will be worse than the first*" means by *the first*, belief in Jesus as Messiah; and by *the last*, belief in his Resurrection.
- verse 65 - "*You have a guard*" or "*Take a guard*". It would be a guard of Roman soldiers not Jewish.
- verse 66 - "*sealing the stone*". Daniel 6.17 has "*A stone was brought and laid upon the mouth of the den, and and the king sealed it with his own signet and with the signet of his lord's, that nothing may be changed concerning Daniel*". Daniel's escape from the den of lions was seen in the early church as a parable of the resurrection.

## **SYMBOLS OF THE PASSION (by Mike Claridge)**

### **5. Nails**

From childhood you knew about nails.

They were always around in the carpenters workshop.

Daggers of iron;  
glistening when new,  
the colour of earth when old.

Instruments of building.  
Instruments to bring together pieces of timber.  
Instruments to fashion usefulness from raw materials.

But you grew to know that nails were only crude.

Nails were not your crafted joints of a skilled carpenter,  
seamlessly binding oak and ash.

Nails were instruments for a quick fix in times of need  
best used out of sight where eye cannot see.

Now nails were to be seen in all their crudeness.

A skilled carpenter will be tortured by the crudest items of his trade.

These soldiers do not know how to build, only to destroy.  
Destroy a life that has grown to adulthood  
surrounded by the very instruments that will be used in his death.

Joints shattered like timber in the hands of a clumsy new apprentice.  
But not now joints wood,  
now joints flesh and bone.

Crunching as the daggers of iron drive through.

Nails,  
some glistening new,  
some earth brown,  
all turning crimson.

Not out of sight these nails.

Theirs was work intended for all to see.  
Lifted high above the crowd.

Not a temporary fix these nails.

Theirs was work intended as to be as permanent as death itself.