

# Hanging Out with Jesus

Stories about Jesus from the Gospels

## Why the “Happiness” Gospel is Letting You Down

Unedited Transcript

*Matthew 27:45-56, John 19:28-30, Luke 23:33-43, Mark 15:33-41*

Good morning, men! Welcome to Man in the Mirror Men's Bible study. If you would go in your Bible's to Matthew chapter 27, verse 45, and we'll begin with a shout out this morning. This is a group called Fight Club at Waypoint Church in Maricopa, AZ. A group of 4 men, and they've been meeting now for 3 years on Wednesday's at 6:00 am at the Honeycutt Coffee Shop and their leader is Frank Turfler and so I wonder if you'd join me in giving a warm Man in the Mirror welcome to Fight Club? One! Two! Three! Hoorah!

We're going to talk, this morning, more about the crucifixion and the death of Jesus. This is the passage in which he actually dies. The title of the message is Why the Happiness Gospel is Letting You Down. You know that you can tune in many places. You can go many places where it seems that the message of the gospel is that Jesus came to give you an abundant life. Of course the Bible says that Jesus came, he said that, "I came that you might have life and have it to the full." Life being "zoe," actually meaning not just eternal life but a physical life that is abundant, "perissos," which is full, superfluous, exceeding what is needed and so there is that promise. In fact Jesus also says on the flip side of that promise in the same verse that there is a thief and the purpose of the thief is to steal from you, to kill you, and to destroy you and everything you care about, everything you love and so we have that abiding promise in the scriptures.

### Details About the Death of Our Leader

Yet, there is a distortion that takes place which leaves out the idea of the suffering servant, Jesus, who gave his life for us. I want us to take a look this morning beginning at Matthew 27, verse 45, Matthew 27, verse 45, and the first thing we're going to talk about today are the details about the death of our leader, the details about the death of our leader, the founder of our faith. These are the items that called this text into existence. This text was called into existence by a desire that the Holy Spirit had to communicate to us not just that Jesus died but the details surrounding his death.

Let's take a look, verse 45, "From the sixth hour until the 9th hour," so 6 hours, roughly noon, the 9th hour is roughly 3 o'clock in the afternoon, "Darkness came over the land." I know we breeze by that but if you stop and think about that for a moment there is a tear in the universe. There is a rip between the eternal and the temporal world that's taking place. There is something very mysterious about this idea. This is not just a storm cloud that's come over the land. It's something transcendent. "At about the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" Which means, "My God, my God, why

have you forsaken me?" Now there can be much discussion. Is this an emotional response of Jesus? Is he feeling the emotion of being forsaken like you and I have the emotion of feeling forsaken by God from time to time? Or is this an actual forsaking of Jesus? Many theologians think that for a moment, for a brief season that God the Father has indeed forsaken Jesus to sin, to pay the price for our sins.

Verse 47, "When some of those standing there heard this they said, He's calling Elijah." Now you don't need to turn there but in the passage in John, the parallel passage in John it says, "After this, Jesus knowing that all things had already been accomplished in order that the scriptures might be fulfilled he said, I am thirsty," just the humanity of his divinity coming out, "And a jar full of sour wine was standing there and they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a branch of hyssop and brought it to his mouth and Jesus received the wine and then he said, It is finished." Then in the passage in Luke it says, "Then Jesus, crying out with a loud voice said, Father into thy hands I commit my spirit." Verse 50, "And when Jesus had cried again in a loud voice saying those things, It is finished and to your hands I commit my spirit," he gave up his spirit, his "pneuma." It's his spirit. It's his life. It's his breath. It's that force that animates the human body. He died. He gave up the spirit.

Then in Luke, well we talked about Luke. "At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom." Lots of people have, over the years, drawn some inference that since it was torn from the top to the bottom that it was torn from the heavenly. Of course that's a speculation but it's interesting to think about. "The earth shook and the rocks split. The tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life." Every time I read this I am startled because in the year that's gone by since I haven't usually read it, I'd forgotten about it, and the idea that this cosmic tear, this rip in the universe, this invasion of the temporal by the transcendent in this powerful way actually in the presence of the holiness of God these bones, these bones became alive. I don't know that we've had an event ever before quite like that or ever since quite like that. "They came out of the tombs and after the resurrection of Jesus they went into the holy city and appeared to many people."

You know C. S. Lewis was a literary critic and Lewis, as noted on his resistant march to become a Christian, when he was converted he said there was never a more unhappy convert in England, never a more unhappy convert in England. He really, he didn't want to become a Christian. He didn't want to become a theist. Then when he became a theist he didn't want to become a Christian. He looks at these verses, these gospels, and he says as a literary critic, a professionally trained literary critic he said, "I was struck," he said, "That this has none of the attributes of a myth. Some of the attributes in certain ways but none of the ways you see myths constructed. There is a historicity to it but it's not really even like a historical document." He says, "These gospels are unartful in the way they are written. They are not history. They are not myth. They are their own thing."

We see in here, this recording of these details of the death of our leader and it's not like anything you've ever read before. It's not like anything you will ever read anywhere else. It is its own thing and you have these witnesses that are accounted for. Where else in literature would you ever read anything like dead people coming to life at the death of this messianic figure Jesus? When the centurion of verse 54 and those who were with him who were guarding Jesus, when they saw the earthquake and all that had happened, all these things going on, they were terrified and they exclaimed, "Surely he was the Son of God."

C. S. Lewis talks about, in his books *Surprised by Joy*, in this resistant march, this forced march towards theism and then Christianity, he said one day he was in a taxicab going to the zoo and as he got in the taxicab he was still unsettled by the idea of this claim that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. If I could find it

he says, "I was driven to this place one sunny morning. When we set out I did not believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and when we reached the zoo I did. Yet, I had not exactly spent the journey in thought, nor in great emotion." He just goes on to say it was the realization that Jesus Christ is the Son of God came upon him and the way it happened is this continual look at these historical details about the life and death of our leader.

"Many women were there," verse 55, "Watching from a distance, they had followed Jesus from Galilee to care for his needs. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joseph," I guess that would be his mother too, "And the mother of Zebedee's sons." What's obvious, in this text, to us and because, well, if we can figure out what is obvious that is where the most deeply nuanced meaning of the text will come from. Here is what should be obvious after looking at this text. Now, I've had a chance to think about it and if you had as much time to think about it as I have had you would have come to this conclusion too. Here's what's obvious. Beginning with the death of our founder, Christians have always been a persecuted people. Beginning with the very death of our leader, our founder, Christians have from the very beginning always been a persecuted people. You will always be a persecuted people. You will always have suffering in your life.

The happiness gospel often gives the impression that if you just believe God, if you just have enough faith then you can rise above this persecution. You can rise above this suffering but suffering is at the very foundation of our faith. It's part of it. It's part of it, a big part of it. The problem is that in the words of Solzhenitsyn, the idea that human beings are created for happiness is undone in the Gulags by the first strike of the jailer's stick because in the Gulags the Christians, we've always been a persecuted people. It started right here with Jesus. In the time of Nero Rome was burned in whatever it was, 62AD, something like that, and the Christians were blamed and they persecuted, they killed Christians, they lit Christians on fire like Roman candles. They lit up the night sky with the bodies of Christians because there was this hatred for people who believed in this Jesus.

In the Gulags people were jailed in 1918. It actually became a crime to be a Christian, to convene like we're convening, to believe. The whole school system was set up around getting people not to believe in any kind of divine being. Karl Marx called religion the opiate of the masses and so they brutalized Christians for 70 years in Russia. They raped women. They killed people. They shocked people. They maimed them trying to get them to renounce their faith and yet in the midst of all that there are examples upon examples upon examples of Christians. One old woman said, "You can cut me into little pieces for all I care but I will never renounce my faith in the One who gives me life." She was actually living an abundant life in a Gulag, being tortured, being threatened by being so.

It's always been a part, suffering, it's just always been part of our faith. Yet when we live, the big idea that I want us to get today is this one. It's this. **Any gospel without suffering is a gospel without Christ.** Any gospel that doesn't include suffering is a gospel that is devoid of Jesus Christ because yes he came to give unto us abundant life but there's also much suffering that goes along with that. Now, this is an application oriented Bible study and so how does this apply to us in our daily lives, this suffering, this death of Jesus?

### **Why "Happy, Healthy, and Wealthy" Doesn't Hold Water**

Next I want to talk about why happy, healthy, and wealthy doesn't hold water. The idea here is that abundant life is a struggle. It's not just that abundant life, there's abundant life and then there's a

struggle. It's that the abundant life is a struggle. To achieve an abundant life actually comes with a great struggle.

Yesterday, we have a passion vine or passion flower vine in our yard and it's a host plant for Gulf Fritillary butterflies so on Monday we counted 18 caterpillars and 6 chrysalises that were already formed. Steve, where's Steve Crone, yeah, so Steve actually and I, saw this with me yesterday. One of the butterflies, early in the morning, had come out of the chrysalis. Then just hung right there for a while as it was waiting for its wings to dry a little bit. Then you know when you see a butterfly it's flitting around, right, but what we saw was a butterfly that was laboring with its wings because the wings were still new, the wings were still wet and it was flying up.

Finally it flew up high enough that it was able to land on the basketball, the net of the basketball hoop where it was in the sunlight. Then it spread its wings a little bit so that they could fully dry. That little butterfly was headed toward abundant life but it's a struggle. It's a struggle. That butterfly had to struggle to achieve that abundant life and so do you and so do I.

Here's the problem with happy, healthy, and wealthy, here's why happy, healthy, and wealthy does not hold water and that's because God wants to be loved and worshiped for who he is, not what he can do for you. God wants to be loved and worshiped for who he is not for what he can do for you. Does he want to do for you? Absolutely but he says, "I am." He is holiness. He is God. You're a parent, some of you are; most of you are. You're a parent. Do you want your children to love you for who you are or for what you can do for them? The whole happy, healthy, wealthy movement, it's all focused around this idea that if you'll become a Christian then God will bless you. God will take care of you. Yes he will but as a byproduct of wanting him, not as a byproduct of using him to get something that we want. That whole happy, wealthy thing it just bypasses this whole realm of suffering.

Look at a few verses with me. Matthew chapter 10, verse 22, we're done at Matthew 26. Matthew chapter 10, verse 22, Jesus says, "All men will hate you because of me but he who stands firm till the end will be saved. When you are persecuted in one place flee to another." Look at 1 Peter chapter 4, verse 12, and you don't have to turn to these verses. You might want to jot them down, though, for a future reference. 1 Peter chapter 4, verse 12, "Dear friends, dear friends, you my dear friends do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering as though something strange were happening to you but rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ so that you may be overjoyed when His glory is revealed."

They took this crown of thorns and early in this persecution they pressed it down into his forehead and into his head. These thorns, I happened to purchase this at a vendor wagon just outside Jerusalem. I can't remember exactly if it was Bethany or some little place but I'll just pass this around. Be careful. Don't give it back to me bloody please. "Rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed." Acts 14:22, "It is through many hardships that we must enter the kingdom of heaven." John 16, verse 33, "In this world you will have trouble but take heart because I have overcome the world."

The big idea here is that any gospel that you hear about that doesn't include suffering it's a gospel that also doesn't include Jesus Christ. Let's face it, when you are young in your faith or have not yet taken hold of your faith one of the things that we're looking for is, "How can I be happy?" The reason people go looking for God in the first place is because they're, what, not what, not happy and so the promise

that you can be happy, happy, happy now, this is a very appealing thing but it's a very immature approach to the gospel.

The idea is that, is the American dream a good thing or a bad thing? It's a wonderful thing. It's a wonderful thing but the American dream, getting the American dream is not the object in believing in Jesus. It's not the object of the gospel. Is the American dream something that Jesus wants for people? Well, let's take off the word American and let's just talk about a better life. Is a better life something that Jesus wants for people? Absolutely, absolutely, but he doesn't want that to be the object of our affections. He wants to be the object of our affections. He doesn't want us to be saying that, "I will love you if you give me this." He wants us to say, "I love you," and then he wants to give you this. You see?

### **What is our response?**

Now, the final thing I want us to see is what our response should be. What is our response? What is our response? Turn with me to Acts chapter 2, verse 22, Acts chapter 2, verse 22. In this text about the crucifixion the Holy Spirit has included all of this detail about the death of Jesus and so it's like a zoom versus a pan. When you watch a news broadcast, and you see the camera pan the audience it gives you the scope and the scale of the thing, right, but it doesn't evoke a big response from you. What is it that evokes a big, emotional response from you? It's a close-up. It's when they zoom in on one person and that person tells the details of their story. That is why the Holy Spirit preserved this text that we've just taken a look at. It's just like your own testimony or any testimony you've ever heard.

How impacted would you be, say if I said that my testimony is that I was really a sinner, and then I heard about Jesus, and I received Jesus, and Jesus came into my life and changed me? Well, that's panning the story but zooming in on the story what if I were to share with you maybe just one part of it that I was so consumed by making money I announced to my parents in the 10th grade that my goal in life was to be a millionaire? I remember weeping at the age of 21 because I was not yet a millionaire as I was talking. I was still in college. I wasn't even out of college. I was so naïve and so absorbed and so engrossed with - And so when I heard about God I was very interested in God because I wanted God to help me become a millionaire. I didn't want to love and worship God for who he is. I wanted to love and worship God because I thought he could give me what I wanted.

I started coming after God or trying to figure out how I could work him, you know? This is the God who hurled the cosmos into existence, who regulates the ebb and flow of the tide, and the lunar cycles, and the rising and the setting of the sun, and I'm going to work him, get him to do what I want. The harder I tried the more frustrating it was. I just had this amorphous pain kind of eating up the lining of my gut and I just thought, "I'm so frustrated. I'm so angry. I'm so miserable. I'm so upset." Everything I've ever wanted, I've been getting it but I'm miserable and I said if I could just form the words on the tip of my tongue that I could somehow expiate this pain.

I began taking out my frustrations on my bride, Patsy, saying things to a woman that man should never say. One morning I was ranting and raving around the house and pacing back and forth. She was sitting in a chair and just sitting there taking it like a man but I glanced over at her and she had these big tears just streaming down her face and I was transfixed. I tried to look away. I couldn't look away and after she held my gaze for what seemed like a brief eternity she asked me this question. She said, "Pat is there anything about me that you like?"

I felt like I'd been tasered and I wandered off to the office and stared out the window for the rest of the morning. I thought to myself, "What happened to you Morley? You wanted to be somebody. You wanted to do something with your life. You wanted to lead a life of significance. You wanted to make a difference with your life but you're just a nobody heading nowhere," and it was really true. Then that in turn led me to become a follower of Jesus. The rest of the story some other time but now that kind of detail does that evoke a different response? Does that evoke a different response?

That's the kind of thing that we see that has happened in this text; that Lewis saw. It's the details of the death of our leader and when we see how much suffering is part of the gospel, that's why happy, healthy, wealthy doesn't hold water as an end unto itself. Our response, Peter did this same thing, he reviewed, he rehearsed these details of the death of Jesus at Acts 2:22, "Men of Israel listen to this, Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders, signs which God did among you through him as you yourselves know. This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge and you with the help of wicked men put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead freeing him from the agony of death because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him," and he says many other things.

Then down to verse 37, "When the people heard all of this they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, Brothers what shall we do? What is our response? And Peter replied, Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." By the way, what is the gift of the Holy Spirit? It's how Jesus gives us abundant life. What are the fruits of the abundant life, the fruits of the Holy Spirit? Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self control, everything we've ever wanted that could make us happy. By responding to the details of the death of our leader and understanding the big idea that any gospel that doesn't include suffering is a gospel without Christ.

Your response, if you are a doubter, it's to repent and believe. If you are a believer, it's to surrender all of these fantasies that you have for happiness that God is going to give you because you're such a good guy, and it's to realize that what he really wants is he wants to be loved and worshiped for who he is, not what he can do for you. It's to say, as it says in Matthew 16:24 and following, "If any man will come after me let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me." That cross, it's the cross upon which this crown of thorns that is passing among you, that was the crown on top of that cross, a crown of suffering. Let us pray.

### **Closing Prayer**

Our dearest Father we come to you this morning with humility to repent and believe in Jesus and to deny ourselves, to take up our crosses, and to follow you, Lord Jesus. Lord, help us to understand this mystery of how the abundant life and suffering fit together and work together. Lord, help us to be reminded often that any gospel we hear about that does not include suffering does not include you either. Lord, help us also to grasp for our own lives this idea that you want to be loved and worshiped for who you are, not for what you can do for us as any parent understands. We ask this in Jesus name, amen.