

The Crucifixion of Jesus

Today crucifixion is obsolete as a form of capital punishment. Since the closest we've ever come to a crucifixion is watching one on the silver screen, we don't really understand what Jesus endured in His death. But if we could at least envision our Lord dying on the cross for our sins, such a scene should motivate us to devote ourselves to Him in the most absolute way; after all, *crucifixion was the most inhumane form of execution in the first century.*

It was so cruel, in fact, that Arthur Custance wrote, "It is to the everlasting credit of the Jews that up to this time they had not condemned their own people to such an inhumane death" (The Seed of Woman, chapter 29); in other words, it was our Lord who was the first to make Jews angry enough to demand crucifixion of one of their own. And what did He do to cause this? Nothing! Not one thing that was wrong or worthy of any sort of punishment, much less crucifixion!

Crucifixion was originally designed as a death for rebellious slaves and revolutionaries: according to J. S. Stewart, "It may be well to remind ourselves of what death by crucifixion meant in the thoughts of the ancient world. With the passing of the years, Christendom has cast a halo of beauty around the cross.... But all this ought not to hide from us the fact that originally the cross was a thing unspeakably shameful and degrading.... Death by crucifixion was reserved by the Romans for slaves and for criminals of the most abandoned [wretched] kind" (The Life and Teaching of Jesus Christ, 181). This is the death which that we must envision Jesus dying today!

The Crucifixion of Our Lord Began with Incredible Torture and Pain.

What was the condition of Jesus when He came to the cross?

- By the time Jesus arrived at the crest of Calvary, He had been so abused that Isaiah 52:14 reads, "His appearance was marred more than any man."
- He had not slept for at least thirty hours.
- He had been dragged through six inquisitions.
- His face was bloodied, bruised, and swollen from beatings, and His beard had been pulled out by its roots: Isaiah 50:6 records Jesus as saying, "'I gave My back to those who struck Me, and My cheeks to those who plucked out the beard; I did not hide My face from shame and spitting.'"
- His flesh was gouged and torn away by scourgings: Matthew 27:26 tells us plainly that Pilate "scourged Jesus" and "delivered Him to be crucified."
- After this torture, He had been forced to bear His cross until He fell beneath it from exhaustion, and because he was so weak, Luke 23:26 declared that "they laid hold of a certain man, Simon a Cyrenian, who was coming from the country, and on him they laid the cross that he might bear it after Jesus."

This torture was only the beginning to the most painful means of capital punishment known in that day—Jesus had yet to endure the crucifixion itself!

The Crucifixion of Our Lord Was Endured without a Sedative.

Mark 15:23 tells us that "They gave [Jesus] wine mixed with myrrh to drink, but He did not take it." So agonizing was the pain of crucifixion that a drugged wine was offered to its victims! But in spite of the pain He had already suffered, Jesus refused this sedative. Yes, it's true John 19:28-30 say that Jesus received some wine, but it was a second offering just before He died; besides that it doesn't say it was mingled with myrrh (the sedative). See...

Jesus was determined to pay the full price for our sins. The price for sin involved great pain. He didn't refuse the pain, because where there's no pain, there's no punishment. Jesus determined to endure the full pain of the crucifixion to bear the full punishment for our sins as foreordained by the Father.

Isaiah chapter 53 foretold that the Sin-Bearer from God would be a Suffering Servant. Verse 5 says, "He was wounded for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes, we are healed." Verse 10 says, "It pleased the LORD to crush Him; He has put Him to grief." Verse 11 says the Father "shall see the distress of His soul, and be satisfied." So Jesus refused the sedative to pay the full price for our sins; there was no other way.

The Crucifixion of Our Lord Included the Awful Humiliation of Nakedness.

Historically, the custom of crucifixion among the Romans was to crucify the victim completely naked, which served to give rise to the humiliation already felt by him. Psalm 22:17-18 portray the shame Jesus felt in His nakedness as His enemies gambled for His clothes: it records Jesus as saying, "I can count all My bones. They look and state at Me. They divide My garments among them. And for My clothing they cast lots." (This passage in Psalm 22 is fulfilled in John 19:24.) Furthermore...

The time and location of the crucifixion of Jesus intensified His humiliation.

- *The time of this humiliating crucifixion was during the feast of Passover.* Many thousands of pilgrims from every nation flocked to Jerusalem to celebrate the feast: one-third of the population of Judea had converged on the city, filling it to overflowing. Jerusalem was crowded with more than two million people at this time: more Jews would see the humiliation of Jesus at the Passover than at any other time of the year.
- *The location for this humiliating crucifixion was near the city, but outside the city gates.* Hebrews 13:12 plainly says that "Jesus ... suffered outside the gate," while John 19:20 plainly says that "Jesus was crucified near the city." And, according to Matthew 27:39, this was a very heavily traveled area: "Those who passed by blasphemed Him, wagging their heads." Besides all that, Luke 23:48

reads, "The whole crowd who came together to that sight, seeing what had been done, beat their breasts and returned."

This awful humiliation was a great part of the price Jesus paid to redeem us from our sins. Isaiah 53:3 portrays the reaction of the multitudes to the bruised and bloodied body of Jesus as it was suspended naked before them: it reads, "He is despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him." Jesus was greatly humiliated for us!

The Crucifixion of Our Lord Was the Most Agonizing Six Hours Any Man Has Ever Experienced.

Jesus was nailed to a cross.

Long before crucifixion was used as a means of capital punishment, Psalm 22:16 prophesied Jesus as saying, "They pierced My hands and My feet." The arms of Jesus were stretched the length of the cross beam, and while one soldier held Him down, another drove a spike through each wrist, the spikes being about six inches long. (I say "wrists" because the wrist was considered part of the hand at that time, and a large nail couldn't be driven through the hand without breaking a bone; and we know that not a bone was broken in Jesus' body.)

After His wrists were nailed to the cross, Jesus was raised by rope or ladder to a position where the cross beam and the vertical beam were secured together; at this point, the complete weight of Jesus' body bore down on the two nails which held Him to the cross.

Jesus continually struggled to breathe.

Jesus would not have survived long on the cross hanging only by his wrists. See, when a person is crucified, his body is suspended with his arms in a "V" position, which caused the rib cage to expand, allowing the victim to inhale, but not exhale. Hanging there by His wrists, the victim would make a heroic attempt to breathe for several minutes, but soon the muscles used in breathing became exhausted. He no longer had the strength to breathe, and He quickly suffocated.

Dr. Hermann Moedder of West Germany conducted experiments in crucifixion. Several students who volunteered to be part of the experiment were suspended in the "V" position with their hands tied to a chin-up bar and their feet suspended. The results were that not one student remained conscious for more than twelve minutes, passing out for lack of oxygen. So to insure a long, agonizing death, a nail was driven through the feet of the victim to function as an added support. The soldiers raised the feet a little so the knees were bent about 90°; then, with one foot on the other, a nail was driven through either the insteps or the ankles of both feet.

The only way to breathe on the cross was to push up with the feet against the nail,

which would relax the breathing muscles and allow the victim to exhale, but causing incredible pain at the same time. When Jesus would push up to breathe, all His weight would bear down on the nail driven through His feet, and standing in this position until He was finished exhaling, He would then sink into the "V" position once again to start a new, seemingly, unending cycle for six hours. Psalm 22:14 reveals the Lord's pain as He fought a battle for every breath: it records Him as saying, "I am poured out like water, and all My bones are out of joint; My heart is like wax, it has melted within Me."

Jesus had a scorching thirst.

Throughout the whole ordeal, the Lord's only complaint was "I am thirsty" (Jn 19:28). The Gospel narratives record no cries for mercy from Jesus as He was scourged or as He was nailed to the cross, but they do record His announcement of thirst. This seems to indicate the Lord's thirst greatly intensified on the cross. Victims of crucifixion, because of the torture, perspiration, and loss of blood developed a raging fever and intensifying thirst. Albert Barnes described a man of the Turkish army who begged for nothing but water while he hung on a cross for two days.

Psalm 22:15 has Jesus prophetically saying, "My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and My tongue clings to My jaws." But...

Jesus' most agonizing moment on the cross had nothing to do with His physical suffering.

The physical pain of the cross, as great as it was, did not compare to the emotional agony which *Jesus suffered the moment He was forsaken by His Father*. Matthew 27:46 says that about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"

Exactly how was Jesus forsaken by His Father? I don't believe it's possible for anyone to be dogmatic about his interpretation of this passage; I don't believe it's even possible to put into words exactly what Jesus was feeling at this moment in time. However, I do believe that's the key—how He felt! He had already been betrayed by one of His disciples and forsaken by the rest of them (at least for a time), and now He even "felt" forsaken by His Father. His Father had always been there for Him before. When people wanted to grab Him and throw Him off a cliff, Luke 4:29-30 tells us about how God allowed Him to miraculously pass through the midst of them and get away, as He had done on other occasions. When He was praying for another way for this work of redemption to be accomplished and God said, "No" ... Luke 22:43 does tell us that the Father did at least send an angel to strengthen Him. But...

On this occasion, when Jesus was on the cross, dying as a sacrifice for us, His Father wasn't there for Him, and Jesus' humanity overcame Him to cry out, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" According to Luke 22:53, God delivered Jesus into the hands of His enemies, letting loose the powers of darkness against Him; instead of His Father answering Him with words of assurance when He was troubled (as He did once before in John 12:27-29), there was no voice from His home this time. Jesus

was the perfect Son, never offending His Father in any way, but God was leaving Him with criminals to be slaughtered as a sacrifice for those who didn't and don't deserve it! Imagine that sort of obedience ... if you can! Well...

The burden of sin and estrangement from the Father is what made the death of Jesus different than the death of any other man; these things are what made the crucifixion of Jesus the most agonizing six hours which any man has ever suffered or ever will suffer. At three in the afternoon, after six hours of unspeakable suffering, the Lord Jesus died—GOD had been crucified for your sins and mine.

Did You Know that the Crucifixion of Jesus Isn't the Only Crucifixion in the New Testament? Every Disciple Must Be Crucified With Jesus.

To become a Christian, our old man of sin must be crucified with Jesus, so that He, by His pure blood, may make us new creations. God teaches us in Isaiah 59:2 that the non-Christian is separated, alienated from God because of sin; to become a friend of God, he must be made free from sin. When reminding some Christians of that fact, Paul wrote in Romans 6:17, "You have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered." He said they obeyed a form of doctrine (teaching). What teaching was he referring to? When one reads First Corinthians 15:1-4, he finds that the doctrine Paul preached to the Romans, the Corinthians, and to everyone else, was the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. The Romans obeyed a form of this teaching, and it made them free from sin. So...

How do we obey a form or pattern of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection? The same way they did. Earlier in Romans 6, verses 3-7, Paul explained that we obey a pattern of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus in the act of baptism. In baptism, one is crucified with Jesus, and the blood of Jesus washes away his sins, making him a new creation (Acts 22:16, Galatians 3:27, & Second Corinthians 5:17).

The new man is the disciple who has died to self. In Galatians 2:20 Paul, using himself as an example, said, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me." When we are crucified with Christ, we no longer live. After all, what is crucifixion but a death? If we're crucified with Christ, then something must die—we die. Our previous lives are dead and buried; our previous ambitions, values, and interests no longer exist—in this sense we die to ourselves. Only after we die to self can Jesus live in us; that is, only then can He fill us with His ambitions, values, and interests.

The new man is also the disciple who has died to the world. Again in Galatians, this time 6:14, Paul wrote, "God forbid that I should glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me and I to the world." What does it mean to be crucified to the world? It means that our values have so changed that the attractions and pressures of the world no longer affect us. It means we're dead to the world ... and *a dead man has no feelings!*

- *You can't embarrass a dead man:* Have you ever been embarrassed to be a Christian? Have you ever been embarrassed to tell your friends you're a

Christian? Have you ever been embarrassed to explain to someone why you live as you do?

- *You can't hurt a dead man's feelings:* A dead man can't hear you. Have you ever heard gossip about yourself? How did it affect you?
- *A dead man doesn't feel peer pressure:* It doesn't matter to him that he's different than all those around him. Does it bother you to be different?
- *A dead man isn't affected by persecution:* Kick a corpse, and see if he runs away. Persecution doesn't move him. Have you ever been persecuted for standing for the right and doing the Lord's work? Did it weaken your convictions? Did it cause you to quit what you were doing? So...

To be crucified with Christ is to die to the world.

In Conclusion...

Sometimes we need to ask ourselves, "Why am I drawn to Jesus?" Then allow the scenes of Calvary to flood our minds, and remember the lashes, the nails, the humiliation, and the agony were meant for us—we earned them, but He bore them. Then ask, "How can I not follow Him?"

Jesus gives us an invitation to follow Him in Matthew 16:24-25. "Take up the cross, for whoever loses his life for My sake will find it." Jesus taught that to "take up the cross" requires "losing one's life." It's been said that when Jesus calls us to take up our crosses and follow Him, He's calling us to come and die, because only in dying with Him can we save our lives. His invitation still invites us to come and die: die to sin and its bondage; die to self and its pettiness; and die to the world and its faulty values. How can we turn Him down after what He has done for us?

[Leland Byars, 1984]

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