

Christ On The Cross

Introduction. When we assemble on the first day of the week, two events in particular take place. We offer an invitation in which we invite those who have never obeyed the gospel call to do so and become a Christian. This is done by obeying the actions which are taught in the Bible (i.e. hearing, believing, repentance, confession and baptism). After this, the Lord adds you to His church. Another event which takes place on the first day of the week is partaking of the Lord's Supper. Here we commemorate the Lord's death until He comes again (1 Corinthians 11:26; Matthew 26:28-29). Jesus instituted this Supper just before He was crucified.

Both of these events depend on the death of our Lord. Yet, many times we seem to let them pass on by without realizing what Jesus Christ really had to endure. The Bible simply states, "and they crucified Him" and "they scourged Him." But what did it really mean? Many times in the scriptures, events are not discussed in detail because they were so common. His death forms the apex of the most important book to have ever existed on the face of the earth. Throughout the Bible we see aspects of God's plan of salvation. It all came to the center stage with the crucifixion of our Lord (Isaiah 53:1-12).

Every first day of the week, you are going to be in one of two situations. Either you have never become a Christian and need desperately to listen to what our Lord went through on the cross for you, or you are a Christian and you are going to partake of the Supper which commemorates what our Lord went through on the cross. Either way, you will be learning something that is absolutely critical to your life.

I do not mean to be gory or coarse, but we need to get the actual effect of what Christ went through. The material of this sermon is taken from a March 21, 1986 article entitled, On the Physical Death of Jesus Christ, from The Journal of the American Medical Association. Its authors are Dr. William Edwards, Dr. Wesley Gabel, and Dr. Floyd Hosmer.

I. ***The Lord's Supper And Gethsemane***

- A. In Matthew 26:26-29, Mark 14:22-25 and Luke 22:19-20, Jesus gave His disciples the commemoration of His death. This symbolized the great sacrifice which had to take place in order to atone for our sins. After Jesus and His disciples observed the Passover meal in an upper room in a home in southwest Jerusalem, they traveled across the Kidron Valley to the Mount of Olives, northeast of the city.
- B. The name "Gethsemane" means "olive press." Therefore, the plot

of ground was probably an olive orchard. Luke describes the Lord as being in "agony" which means "anxiety, fear, strong emotion, and extreme anguish of mind." The gospel writers used terms such as "sore amazed," "very heavy," and "exceeding sorrowful," to show the state of mind of Jesus (Hebrews 5:7-9).

- C. The disciples simply did not have the ability to remain awake while the Lord prayed. Jesus prayed for the cup to pass from Him. The cup was not removed; He was given the strength to drink it. The angel came to strengthen Him (Luke 22:43). Finally, Judas, with the soldiers and mob, arrived to arrest Jesus and lead Him away to the trials. Never at any time in His ministry does the Master show more impressively the peace which is above the understanding of the world. Jesus showed incredible gentleness even toward the traitor. The devil had been close at hand, but he had lost the battle with Jesus.

II. ***The Trials***

A. Jewish trials.

1. Soon after midnight, Jesus was arrested at Gethsemane by the temple officials and taken first to Annas for a preliminary examination (John 18:12-24).
2. Between 1 a.m. and daybreak, Jesus was tried before Caiaphas, aided by a group of the Jewish Sanhedrin, and was found guilty of blasphemy (Matthew 26:57-68; Mark 14:55-65; Luke 22:54). It is here that the first physical trauma was inflicted. The guards blindfolded Jesus, spat on him, and struck him in the face with their fists. A soldier struck Jesus across the face for remaining silent before Caiaphas.
3. Soon after daybreak, Jesus, battered and bruised, dehydrated and exhausted from a sleepless night, is taken before the entire Sanhedrin assembled at the residence of Caiaphas. They condemn Him and then take Him to Pilate (Luke 22:66-71).

B. Roman trials.

1. The formal accusation before Pilate is now made (Matthew 27:1-2; Mark 15:1; Luke 23:1-2; John 18:28-32). Pilate then has a discussion with Jesus (Matthew 27:11; Mark 15:2; Luke 23:3; John 18:33-38).
2. Pilate acquits Jesus and further charges are made by the Jews. Christ refuses to answer Pilate (Matthew 27:12-14; Mark 15:3-5; Luke 23:4-5).
3. Jesus is then taken to Herod (Luke 23:6-12). Herod sends Him back to Pilate after finding nothing worthy of death in the charges.

4. Pilate acquits Jesus a second time (Luke 23:13-17). Pilate offers Jesus or Barabbas to the Jews (Matthew 27:15-18; Mark 15:6-10; John 18:39). Pilate's wife warns him of her dream (Matthew 27:19).
5. The Jews choose Barabbas and cry out to crucify Jesus (Matthew 27:20-22; Mark 15:11-13; Luke 23:18-21; John 18:40). Pilate attempts to save Jesus (Matthew 27:23; Mark 15:14; Luke 23:22-23).
6. Pilate washes his hands and declares Jesus to be innocent (Matthew 27:24-25). The sentence of crucifixion is given (Mark 15:15; Luke 23:24-25).
7. After Jesus is scourged, Pilate tries one more time to save Jesus (John 19:4-16).

III. ***The Scourging***

- A. In Matthew 27:27-31, Jesus was scourged. Flogging was a legal preliminary to every Roman execution, and only women and Roman senators or soldiers were exempt.
- B. Jesus was stripped of His clothing and His hands tied to a post above His head. A Roman soldier then steps forward with the flagrum in his hand. This is a short whip consisting of several heavy, leather thongs with two small balls of lead attached near the ends of each. The heavy whip is brought down with full force again and again across Jesus' shoulders, back and legs.
- C. At first, the heavy thongs cut through the skin only. Then, as the blows continue, they cut deeper producing an oozing of blood from the capillaries and veins of the skin, and finally spurting blood from vessels in the underlying muscles. The small balls of lead first produce large, deep bruises which are broken open by subsequent blows. Finally, the skin of the back is hanging in long ribbons and the entire area is an unrecognizable mass of torn, bleeding tissue. When it is determined by the centurion in charge that the prisoner is near death, the beating is finally stopped. In 1 Peter 2:24, the Greek word used for "stripes" indicates that Jesus' scourging was particularly harsh.
- D. The half-fainting Jesus is then untied and allowed to slump to the stone pavement, wet with His own blood. The Romans see a great joke in the Jew claiming to be a king. They throw a robe around Him and place a stick in His hand for a scepter. They need a crown to make their mockery complete. A small bundle of branches covered with long thorns are plaited into the shape of a crown and then pressed into His scalp.
- E. After mocking Him and striking Him across the face, the soldiers

take the stick from His hand and strike Him across the head, driving the thorns deeper into His scalp. Finally, they tire of their sadistic sport and the robe is torn from His back. The robe would have already stuck to the clots of blood and serum in the wounds, and its removal, just as in the careless removal of a surgical bandage, causes excruciating pain ... almost as though He were being whipped again, thus causing fresh bleeding.

IV. ***The Crucifixion***

- A. Now the agonizing moment of crucifixion begins. Although the Romans did not invent crucifixion, they perfected it as a form of torture and capital punishment that was designed to produce a slow death with maximum pain and suffering. It was one of the most disgraceful and cruel methods of execution and usually was reserved only for slaves, foreigners, revolutionaries and the vilest of criminals. Roman law usually protected Roman citizens from crucifixion.
- B. After the scourging, the Romans returned His garments and tied the heavy beam across His shoulders. It was customary for the condemned man to carry his own cross from the flogging post to the site of the crucifixion outside the city walls. Since the weight of the entire cross was probably well over 300 pounds, only the crossbar was carried. The patibulum, weighing 75 to 125 pounds was placed across the nape of the victim's neck and balanced along both shoulders. Jesus could not even bear the weight of the cross, so they had to compel Simon the Cyrene to carry it for Him (Matthew 27:32).
- C. The procession to the site of the crucifixion was led by a complete Roman military guard, headed by a centurion. One of the soldiers carried a sign (titulus) on which the condemned man's name and crime were displayed. Later, the titulus would be attached to the top of the cross (Matthew 27:37; Luke 23:38; John 19:20). The heavy upright wooden stipes, on which the patibulum would be secured, were permanently located outside the city walls (Hebrews 13:13).
- D. On the cross, Jesus is offered wine mixed with myrrh, a mild analgesic mixture. He refuses to drink (Matthew 27:34; Mark 15:23). Simon is ordered to place the cross on the ground and Jesus is thrown backward with His shoulders against the wood. The soldier feels for the depression at the front of the wrist. He drives a heavy, square, wrought-iron nail through the wrist and deep into the wood. Quickly, he moves to the other side and repeats the action, being careful not to pull the arms too tightly

but to allow some flexibility and movement. The cross is then lifted into place. The left foot is pressed backward against the right foot, and with both feet extended, toes down, a nail is driven through the arch of each, leaving the knees moderately flexed. As He slowly sags down with more weight on the nails in the wrists, excruciating, fiery pain shoots along the fingers and up the arms. As He pushes Himself upward to avoid this stretching there is the searing agony of the nail tearing through the nerves between the bones of the feet.

- E. As the arms fatigue, great waves of cramps sweep over the muscles, knotting them in deep, relentless, throbbing pain. With these cramps come the inability to push Himself upward. Hanging by His arms, His muscles become paralyzed. Air can be drawn into the lungs, but cannot be exhaled. Jesus fights to raise Himself in order to get even one short breath. Finally, carbon dioxide builds up in the lungs and in the bloodstream and the cramps partially subside. Spasmodically, He is able to push Himself upward to exhale and bring in the life-giving oxygen.
- F. The length of this agony was inversely related to the severity of the scourging, but death was rarely seen before thirty-six hours had passed. The weakness of Jesus after His scourging is the likely explanation of His relatively quick death, which was a matter of astonishment to Pilate (Mark 15:44). Hours of this limitless pain, cycles of twisting, joint-rending cramps, and searing pain as tissue is torn from His lacerated back as He moves up and down against the rough timber continues. Jesus must then bear another agony, a deep, crushing pain in His chest as the pericardium slowly fills with serum and begins to compress the heart.
- G. It is now almost over -- the loss of tissue fluids has reached a critical level as His compressed heart is struggling to pump blood into the tissues. The lungs are making a frantic effort to draw in small gulps of air. A sponge is soaked in sour wine and is lifted to His lips. He apparently does not take any of the liquid (John 19:29). The body of Jesus is now pushed beyond the point of endurance, and He can feel the chill of death creeping through His tissues. Christ's mission of atonement has been completed. With one last surge of strength, He presses His torn feet against the nail, straightens His legs, takes a deep breath, and utters His last cry: "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit" (Luke 23:46).

V. ***The Death***

- A. In order that the Sabbath be not profaned, the Jews asked that

the condemned men be removed from the crosses. The common method of ending a crucifixion was by breaking the legs. This prevented the victim from pushing himself upward; the tension could not be relieved from the muscles of the chest and rapid suffocation occurred within minutes. The legs of the two thieves were broken, but when they came to Jesus they saw this was unnecessary (John 19:31-33). Death by crucifixion was, in every sense of the word, excruciating (Latin, *excruciat*, or "out of the cross").

- B. John 19:34 describes the piercing of Jesus' side and emphasizes the sudden flow of blood and water. The water probably represented pericardial fluid and would have preceded the flow of blood and been smaller in volume than the blood.

Conclusion. I hope that as you sit there today you think of what the Lord's death means. If you are a follower of Christ, you partake of the Lord's Supper and remember His death for you. Remember His great love for you. Jesus could not have demonstrated his love for us with any greater clarity or greater devotion. But every time we leave, every time we follow our own road, every time we disregard God's word, we "crucify to ourselves the Son of God, afresh, and put Him to open shame" (Hebrews 6:6). Will you crucify Christ again and put Him to an open shame?

If you are not a member of the Lord's church, you cannot pay the price of salvation yourself. Christ invites you to come to Him, follow Him and receive the free gift of salvation. But please remember that salvation is free only because it cost Christ everything!