

MATTHEW 27 – JESUS' SCOURGING AND CRUCIFIXION



When Pontius Pilate saw the angry crowd spurned on by the religious leaders, he relented and condemned Jesus to death by crucifixion.

But the Bible doesn't let Pilate off the hook just because he symbolically washed his hands of the event. In Acts 4 we see that all who were present and consented to Jesus' death are held responsible for what they did. It says: "For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, *both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel*, were gathered together to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done" (Acts 4:27-28, emphasis added throughout).

So Jesus was taken away, first to be whipped and then crucified. Barclay says about the Roman whipping, or scourging: "Roman scourging was a *terrible torture*. The victim was stripped; his hands were tied behind him, and he was tied to a post with his back bent double and conveniently exposed to the lash. The lash itself was a long leather thong, studded at intervals with sharpened pieces of bone and pellets of lead. Such scourging always preceded crucifixion and 'it reduced the naked body to strips of raw flesh, and inflamed and bleeding wounds.' Men died under it, and men lost their reason under it, and few remained conscious to the end of it" (notes on Mt. 27:26).

After this terrible whipping, the soldiers, "twisted a crown of thorns and put it on His head, and they put on Him a purple robe. Then they said, 'Hail, King of the Jews!' And they struck Him with their hands. Pilate then went out again, and said to them, 'Behold, I am bringing Him out to you, that you may know that I find no fault in Him.' Then Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. And Pilate said to them, 'Behold the Man!' Therefore, when the chief priests and officers saw Him, they cried out, saying, 'Crucify Him, crucify Him!' Pilate said to them, 'You take Him and crucify Him, for I find no fault in Him. The Jews answered him, 'We have a law, and according to our law He ought to die, because He made Himself the Son of God.' Therefore, when Pilate heard that saying, he was the more afraid, and went again into the Praetorium, and said to Jesus, 'Where are You from?' But Jesus gave him no answer. Then Pilate said to Him, 'Are You not

speaking to me? Do You not know that I have power to crucify You, and power to release You?"

Jesus answered, 'You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above. Therefore the one who delivered Me to you has the greater sin.' From then on Pilate sought to release Him, but the Jews cried out, saying, 'If you let this Man go, you are not Caesar's friend. Whoever makes himself a king speaks against Caesar.' When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he brought Jesus out and sat down in the judgment seat in a place that is called The Pavement, but in Hebrew, *Gabbatha*. Now it was *the Preparation Day of the Passover*, and about the sixth hour. And he said to the Jews, 'Behold your King!' But they cried out, 'Away with Him, away with Him! Crucify Him!' Pilate said to them, 'Shall I crucify your King?' The chief priests answered, 'We have no king but Caesar!' Then he delivered Him to them to be crucified. Then they took Jesus and led Him away" (John 19:2-16). Thus ends the most unjust but most important trial in history!

Now, "the Preparation Day of the Passover," in Greek, (*paraskeue tou pascha*), actually refers to preparing for the Jewish Passover, celebrated on the evening of the First day of Unleavened Bread, which was a holy and a rest day. John again says a bit later in verse 31, "Therefore, because it was *the Preparation Day*, that the bodies should not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (*for that Sabbath was a high day*)." The "high day" refers to the First day of Unleavened Bread.

As *The Believer's Bible Commentary* notes, "Actually, the Passover feast *had been held on the previous evening*. The Preparation Day of the Passover means the preparation *for* the feast that followed it" (notes on John 19:1).

The route taken by Jesus was probably from the Fortress Antonia through the center of the city to its outskirts, where He and two thieves carried their stakes to a place called Golgotha.

Luke adds some details to the account, "Now as they led Him away, 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" (Luke 23:26).

Barclay explains, "When a criminal was condemned to be crucified, he was taken from the

judgment hall and set in the middle of a hollow square of four Roman soldiers. His own cross was then laid upon his shoulders. And he was marched to the place of crucifixion by the longest possible route, while before him marched another soldier bearing a placard with his crime inscribed upon it, so that he might be a terrible warning to anyone else who was contemplating such a crime. That is what they did with Jesus. He began by carrying his own cross (John 19:17); but under its weight his strength gave out and he could carry it no farther.

"Palestine was an occupied country and any citizen could be immediately impressed into the service of the Roman government. The sign of such impressment was a tap on the shoulder with the flat of the blade of a Roman spear. When Jesus sank beneath the weight of his cross, the Roman centurion in charge looked round for someone to carry it. Out of the country into the city there came Simon from far off Cyrene, which is modern Tripoli (Libya). No doubt he was a Jew who all his life had scraped and saved so that he might be able to eat one Passover at Jerusalem. The flat of the Roman spear touched him on the shoulder and he found himself, willy-nilly, carrying a criminal's cross" (notes on Luke 23:26).

The account continues, "And a great multitude of the people followed Him, and women who also mourned and lamented Him. But Jesus, turning to them, said, 'Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For indeed the days are coming in which they will say, 'Blessed are the barren, wombs that never bore, and breasts which never nursed!' Then they will begin 'to say to the mountains, 'fall on us! And to the hills, 'cover us!' For if they do these things in the green wood [peacetime], what will be done in the dry [in war]?" (Lk. 23:27-31).

Jesus was prophesying about the coming destruction of Jerusalem. He mentioned to His disciples in Matthew 24. Josephus describes the terrible siege the city went through from 66-70 A.D., when starvation was so horrendous mothers actually ate their own babies and when the city fell, people hid in putrid sewers to avoid Roman captors. Jesus knew all of this ahead of time.

About the cross, which has become a religious symbol and even an idol, or an object of adoration, in most of Christianity, we need to know the truth.

W. E. Vine gives this eye-opening history about the cross: "The Greek term for cross, *stauros* denotes, primarily, 'an upright pale or stake.' On such, malefactors were nailed for execution. Both the noun and the verb *stauroo*, 'to fasten to a stake or pale,' are originally to be distinguished from the ecclesiastical [or church] form of a two beamed 'cross.' The shape of the latter had its origin in ancient Chaldea, and was used as the symbol of the god Tammuz (being in the shape of the mystic Tau, the initial of his name) in that country and in adjacent lands, including Egypt. By the middle of the 3rd century A.D. the churches had either departed from, or had travestied [distorted], certain doctrines of the Christian faith. In order to increase the prestige of the apostate ecclesiastical system, pagans were received into the churches apart from regeneration by faith, and *were permitted largely to retain their pagan signs and symbols*. Hence the Tau or T, in its most frequent form, with the cross-piece lowered, was adopted to stand for the 'cross' of Christ.

"As for the Chi, or X, which Constantine declared he had seen in a vision leading him to champion the Christian faith, that letter was the initial of the word 'Christ' and had nothing to do with 'the Cross.' The method of execution was borrowed by the Greeks and Romans from the Phoenicians. The *stauros* denotes (a) 'the cross, or stake itself,' e.g., Mt. 27:32 (b) 'the crucifixion suffered,' e.g., 1Cor. 1:17-18, where 'the word of the cross,' stands for the gospel; Galatians 5:11, where crucifixion is metaphorically used of the renunciation of the world, that characterizes the true Christian life" (*Complete Expository Dictionary of N. T. Words*).

Ralph Woodrow also has a fine section on the history of the cross, "But, since Jesus died on a cross, some ask, does this not make it a Christian symbol? No. The fact that Jesus was killed on a cross [or a stake] shows that it was already an established form of punishment and death—among pagans. It was not a Christian symbol when Jesus hung on it, and nothing has ever changed to make it a Christian symbol now! As one has asked, 'Suppose Jesus had been killed with a shotgun, would this be any reason to have a shotgun hanging from our necks or on top of the church roof? Would this make a shotgun a Christian symbol of virtue? No. It is not *what* killed

our Lord, but *what his death accomplished* that is important!...Catholicism, adopting the pagan idea of cross worship, also adopted these various forms of the cross. Thus, to this day, the Catholic church does not adore just ONE type of cross, but numerous types" (*Babylon, Mystery Religion*, 1976, pgs. 54-55). The use of the cross as a religious symbol falls into the category of an idol, and breaks the Second Commandment of God.

The account says, "And when they had come to a place called Golgotha, that is to say, Place of a Skull, they gave Him sour wine mingled with gall to drink [Mark 15:23 says myrrh]. But when He had tasted it, He would not drink" (Mt. 27:33-34).

Barclay comments, "The place of crucifixion was a hill called Golgotha, so called because it was shaped like a skull. When the place was reached the criminal had to be impaled upon his cross. The nails had to be driven through his hands [now the archaeological evidence points to it being through the wrists to hold up the weight of the body], but commonly the feet were only loosely bound to the cross. At that moment, in order to deaden the pain, the criminal was given a drink of drugged wine, prepared by a group of wealthy women of Jerusalem as an act of mercy. A Jewish writing says, 'When a man is going out to be killed, they allow him to drink a grain of frankincense in a cup of wine to deaden his senses....Wealthy women of Jerusalem used to contribute these things and bring them.' The drugged cup was offered to Jesus, but he would not drink it, for He was determined to accept death at its bitterest and at its grimmest, and to avoid no particle of pain."

Pontius Pilate did one final thing before Jesus was crucified and showed Jesus was no impostor, "Now Pilate wrote a title and put it on the cross. And the writing was: Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews. Then many of the Jews read this title, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin. Therefore the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, 'Do not write, 'The King of the Jews,' but, 'He said, 'I am the 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 each soldier a part, and also the tunic. Now the tunic was without seam, woven from the top in

one piece. They said therefore among themselves, 'Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be,' that the Scripture might be fulfilled which says: 'They divided my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.' Therefore the soldiers did these things" (John 19:19-24).

Each Gospel account mentions what the sign said that was placed on top of the stake, but since it was written in three languages, they gave slight variations, but basically say the same thing.

Jesus' suffering was not only from the tremendous pain, but also from all the humiliation.

Matthew relates, "And those who passed by blasphemed Him, wagging their heads and saying, 'You who destroy the temple and build it in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross.' Likewise the chief priests also, mocking with the scribes and elders, said, 'He saved others; Himself He cannot save. If He is 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.' Even the robbers who were crucified with Him reviled Him with the same thing" (Mt. 27:39)."

These things were prophesied to happen according to Psalms 22, and Jesus suffered stoically all the insults. As Matthew says, "Now from the sixth hour until the ninth hour there was darkness over all the land. And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "*Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?*" that is, 'My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?' (Mt. 27:45-46).

Barclay comments, "It is strange how Psalms 22 runs through the whole crucifixion narrative; and this saying is actually the first verse of that Psalm. Later on it says, 'All who seek me mock at me, they make mouths at me, they wag their heads;' He committed his cause to the Lord; let him deliver him, let him rescue him, for he delights in him!' (Ps. 22:7-8). Still further on we read: 'They divide my garments among them, and for my raiment they cast lots' (Ps. 22:18). Psalms 22 is interwoven with the whole crucifixion story."

Meanwhile, God's heart in heaven was breaking, and it became dark like an eclipse of the sun (lasts 7 min.), but much longer. Jesus felt that separation from God because right then, He took all the sins of mankind upon Himself (2 Cor. 5:21).