

The Crucifixion Of Christ

by David Padfield

On the Sunday before His death on the cross, Jesus triumphantly entered the city of Jerusalem. On that Monday, He spoke of His impending death ([John 12:27-33](#)). The death of Christ embraces the sum and total of our salvation.

The story of the cross was the theme of the apostles ([1 Cor. 2:1-2](#)). Paul was not a social reformer nor a political activist. He gloried not in titles, but in the cross ([Gal. 6:14](#)). The plain and simple story of the cross will exalt Christ and draw men to His bleeding side. The crucifixion of Jesus Christ is the foundation of the gospel ([1 Cor. 15:1-3](#)).

Why Did Christ Have To Die?

Our sins have separated us from God ([Ezek. 18:20](#); [Isa. 59:1-2](#); [Rom. 3:23](#)), and the punishment for sin is death ([Rom. 6:23](#)).

In order for sins to be removed, blood had to be shed ([Heb. 9:22](#)). In the Old Testament instead of man dying, God allowed an animal to die ([Heb. 10:4](#)). Think of all the lambs slain from the days of Abel till Christ. On a normal Passover day in the first century over 250,000 lambs would be slain.

Picture the scene as [John the Baptist](#) sees Jesus walking toward him, and hear John say, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" ([John 1:29](#)). How fitting that the Lamb of God be born in a stable ([Luke 2:1-7](#))! It is interesting that His first visitors were [shepherds](#) ([Luke 2:8-20](#)).

"But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone." ([Heb. 2:9](#)).

The Betrayal Of Christ

On the Thursday evening before His betrayal, Christ partook of one last Passover meal with His disciples ([Matt. 26:26-29](#)). After supper, He passes through the Golden Gate and then crosses over the Kidron Valley and enters the [Garden of Gethsemane](#). His "hour" had now come -- He prayed that the "cup" would pass from Him ([Matt. 26:36-39](#)).

Later that evening, soldiers from the chief priests come with swords and clubs ([Matt. 26:47](#)). Judas betrays our Lord with a kiss ([Matt. 26:48-50](#)). Peter cuts off the right ear of Malchus ([Matt. 26:51-53](#)). Jesus reminds Peter that He could have called for twelve legions of angels to save Him from this death.

The Son Of God On Trial

Christ is brought before the Sanhedrin and Caiaphas the High Priest -- even though it was illegal for the Sanhedrin to put anyone on trial at night. "Now the chief priests, the elders, and all the council sought false testimony against Jesus to put Him to death, but found none. Even though many false witnesses came forward, they found none. But at last two false witnesses came forward" ([Matt. 26:59-60](#)). "Then the high priest tore his clothes, saying, 'He has spoken blasphemy! What further need do we have of witnesses? Look, now you have heard His blasphemy!'" ([Matt. 27:65](#)).

Our Lord is then struck, beaten, spat upon and mocked ([Matt. 26:67-68](#)). During this mockery, Peter denies Him three times ([Matt. 26:69-75](#)). Luke tells us that the Lord looked at Peter ([Luke 22:61](#)). "Then Judas, His betrayer, seeing that He had been condemned, was remorseful and ... went and hanged himself" ([Matt. 27:3-10](#)).

It is now early in the morning and Jesus is battered and bruised, dehydrated and exhausted -- His face covered with the spittle of His accusers. He is now taken across the city of Jerusalem to the Praetorium of the Procurator of Judea, Pontius Pilate. Jewish leaders call the governor outside to ask a favor ([John 18:28](#)). These Jewish leaders wanted a death sentence, but Pilate made it difficult ([John 18:29-32](#)). You have to wonder with what tone of voice Pilate said, "You are the king of the Jews?" ([John 18:33](#), NASV). You can see Pilate burning at the answer Christ gives ([John 18:34-35](#)), but Pilate could find no fault in Christ ([John 18:36-38](#)).

Our Lord is then taken to Herod Antipas, the tetrarch of Judea ([Luke 23:5-11](#)). Jesus remains silent before Herod. We are reminded of the words of the prophet of God, "He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not his mouth" ([Isa. 53:7](#)). Again He is mocked, a gorgeous robe is placed on Him, and He is then sent back to Pilate.

In response to a mob, Pilate offers to release either Jesus or a notorious thief and murderer called Barabas ([Matt. 27:15-18, 21](#)). The mob demands that Christ be crucified and Barabas be set free. Can you think of a more humiliating thing for Christ to endure? The firstborn of all creation compared to a filthy felon! We see the full meaning of John's statement, ([John 1:11](#), "He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him" ([John 1:11](#)).

Preparation For The Crucifixion

Pilate orders that Jesus be scourged ([Matt. 27:26](#)). Christ was not whipped, flogged or striped -- He was scourged! The Romans called it "halfway death" -- it could only be administered by a trained Roman "lictor." Jesus was stripped of all His clothing and His hands were tied above His head. The lictor would use a flagellum -- a leather whip made up with thongs of leather. Each strip had a piece of bone or lead tied to the ends so it would cut deeper into the flesh. Josephus speaks of a man named Ananus who was "whipped until his bones were bare." Eusebius speaks of a martyr in Smyrna who was scourged until "the deepest veins and arteries were exposed, and even the inner organs of the body were seen." Here we recall the words of Isaiah, "But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed" ([Isa. 53:5](#)).

Christ is then untied, falls to the floor, and is given a scarlet robe, a crown of thorns and reed ([Matt. 27:27-31](#)). While He is blindfolded, the soldiers mock him. Again, we hear Isaiah say of Him, "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" ([Isa. 50:6](#)). As the blood around His open wounds begins to clot, the soldiers rip the robe off and His wounds begin bleeding again. It is my understanding that Pilate only wanted to scourge Christ, but when the people charged that he was not properly defending Caesar, he order Christ to be crucified on a Roman cross (cf. [Luke 23:16](#)).

The Crucifixion Of Christ

Crucifixion was a common practice among the Romans -- it was a custom borrowed from the Carthaginians. In 71 B.C., 6000 followers of Spartacus were crucified along the Appian Way from Capua to [Rome](#).

"When Herod the Great died the nationalists, spurning the pacific counsels of Hillel, declared a revolt against Herod's successor Archelaus, and encamped in tents about the Temple. Archelaus' troops slew 3000 of them, many of whom had come to Jerusalem for the Passover festival (4 B.C.). At the following feast of Pentecost the rebels gathered again, and once more suffered great slaughter; the Temple cloisters were burned to the ground, the treasures of the sanctuary were plundered by the legions, and many Jews killed themselves in despair. Patriot bands took form in the countryside, and made life precarious for any supporter of Rome; one such band, under Judas the Gaulonite, captured Sepphoris, the capital of Galilee. Varus, governor of Syria, entered Palestine with 20,000 men, razed hundreds of towns, crucified 2000 rebels, and sold 30,000 Jews into slavery." (Will Durant, *Caesar And Christ*, pp. 542-543).

"Crucifixion was a Roman, not a Jewish, form of punishment. It was usually preceded by scourging, which, carried out thoroughly, left the body a mass of swollen and bloody flesh ... All who cared to witness the horrible spectacle were free to do so; the Romans, who thought it necessary to rule by terror, chose, for capital offenses by other than Roman citizens, what Cicero called 'the most cruel and hideous of tortures.' The offender's hands and feet were bound (seldom nailed) to the wood; a projecting block supported the backbone or the feet; unless mercifully killed, the victim would linger there for two or three days, suffering the agony of immobility, unable to brush away the insects that fed upon his naked flesh, and slowly losing strength until the heart failed and brought an end. Even the Romans sometimes pitied the victim, and offered him a stupefying drink." (Durant, *Caesar And Christ*, p. 572).

The Roman cross was like a capital "T." The crossbeam (*patibulum*) weighed about 100 pounds -- it was tied across His shoulders and He was led out through a road now known as the Via Dolorosa. Let your mind picture the procession with Christ and the two thieves being led by a Roman Centurion. "He was taken from prison and from judgment, and who will declare His generation?" ([Isa. 53:8](#)).

Despite His efforts to walk erect He falls and rough wood gouges His body. The Roman Centurion compels Simon to carry the cross the rest of the way from the Fortress Antonia to Calvary ([Luke 23:26](#)). "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.'" ([Luke 23:27-28](#)).

At Golgotha, Jesus is thrown back onto the rough wood and spikes are driven into His hands. The cross beam is lifted up carefully, and His left foot is pressed back against the right and a nail is driven in. The Son of God is now crucified! "Now from the sixth hour until the ninth hour there was darkness over all the land" ([Matt. 27:45](#)).

In bitter irony, Pilate orders a sign placed over the cross "in letters of Greek, Latin, and Hebrew: This is the King of the Jews" ([Luke 23:38](#)). All those who passed by blasphemed Him ([Matt. 27:39-44](#)).

Words On The Cross

While on the cross, Christ makes seven brief utterances. While soldiers were gambling for His garments ([John 19:23-24](#)), He says, "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do" ([Luke 23:34](#)).

To the penitent thief beside Him, He says, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise" ([Luke 23:43](#)).

Looking into the eyes of Mary, His mother, He says, "Woman, behold your son!" and to grief-stricken John He says, "Behold your mother!" ([John 19:26-27](#)).

As He feels His Father's presence leaving Him, Jesus cries out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is, My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" ([Psa. 22:1](#); [Matt. 27:46](#)).

"After this, Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, 'I thirst!'" ([John 19:28](#)).

Then, in a tone possibly little more than a whisper, He declares, "It is finished!" ([John 19:30](#)).

Finally, He presses against the nails and says, "Father, into Your hands I commend My spirit" ([Luke 23:46](#)).

His Death

In order to make doubly sure of His death, a legionnaire drives a lance into His side ([John 19:31-34](#)). The veil in the temple was torn in two, the rocks split and the earth trembles and shakes at the death of its Creator ([Matt. 27:51](#)). "Now when the centurion and those with him, who were guarding Jesus, saw the earthquake and the things that had happened, they feared greatly, saying, 'Truly this was the Son of God!'" ([Matt. 27:54](#)).

Jesus is taken down from the cross, buried in a borrowed tomb and on the third day rises from the grave never to die again ([Matt. 27:57 -- 28:10](#)). Forty days later He ascended into Heaven to sit at the right hand of God ([Luke 24:50-53](#)). One day He will come again ([Acts 1:9-12](#)).

This is the story that never grows old! We must tell our children so their hearts will be touched. All gospel sermons preached since that day have pointed back to this wonderful story. But, we do not preach it to make people feel sorry for Christ -- we preach so people can see the enormity of sin and its consequences -- the innocent had to die for the guilty ([Rom. 5:7-9](#)).

John, while in exile on the island of Patmos, reminded us of "Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood" ([Rev. 1:5](#)). We picture the scene before the throne of God where the redeemed sing, "You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation..." ([Revelation 5:9](#)).

Conclusion

As we are baptized into Christ for the remission of sins, we are "baptized into His death." In baptism we re-enact His death, burial and resurrection ([Rom. 6:1-4](#)).