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The Cross

“Jesus called out with a loud voice, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.” When he had said this, he breathed his last.” Luke 23:46

Key verses: Psalm 22; Matthew 27; Mark 15; Luke 23; John 19

Key personalities: Jesus, and the Disciples.

Timeline: The God of Eternity; He enters as a Man, being fully God and fully Man, walks this earth as our Lead, then dies for our sins to give us redemption and new life now and for eternity, 28-33 A.D.

Our Lord and Savior has begun His tremendous physical suffering and humiliation on our behalf. He was accused of a crimes He did not commit--crimes that we have and do commit. He was unjustly tried for our crimes and scourged for our sins. Jesus was submitting to the will of God in the midst of thugs and His disloyal Disciples, the conniving, religious leaders. He came into this world to serve. Jesus had no thought retaliation, He did not consider disobeying His Father, and He did not look for a way to escape harm even though He was completely and perfectly blameless. If He had retaliated, disobeyed God's Will, and/or escaped, we would not have redemption! Fortunately for us, He is also God, and He stayed obedient to the Father in the midst of injustice and evil for our benefit!

Key Happenings: Jesus suffered on our behalf! Jesus dies for us!

Jesus was handed over to Pontius Pilate for a hearing at the malevolent requests of the religious leaders who sought His death. So, the crucifixion of our Lord and Savior begins. This is the most heinous torture and death ever conceived of given to an innocent Man who is also Fully God and who takes our place both in life and in death, dying and rising again so we may live. On what we now call Good Friday, Jesus carries the top beam of His own cross to the place of His execution, the Skull of Golgotha. He is lifted up in sadistic torture to please the pride of the pious, fraud hypocrites as our Perfect Sacrifice for the payment of our sins in full. He is further humiliated by being placed between two common criminals--one who will be saved and one who will chose to remain in his pride and sin. As the sign states, here is the "King of the Jews," lifted up in reality and into infamy as a mockery. Yet, the prideful religious leaders still objected. People looked on and mocked Jesus, and soldiers gambled for His clothes while Jesus gave out His final wishes--that His mother be taken care of and that His disciples step up to the plate of responsibility and effectual relationships that would echo down to us today and throughout all of eternity.

Pontius Pilate (governed 26-36 A.D.) lived in Caesarea and was primarily there with a Roman detachment of soldiers to keep order during the Passover. The overcrowded and angry people had the potential of rioting over the oppression of losing their lands and livelihood. He gives the classic responsibility-ducking response, *"What is truth?"*--completely reminiscent of many people today, called *postmodernism*. This is merely a defense mechanism to avoid responsibility and absolute truth. Pilate had the great opportunity to showcase Truth, yet he did not want to take responsibility (Mark 15:1; Luke 23:1; John 18:28).

- How many of us miss opportunities because we take hold of our desires, scheme and seek ourselves regardless of consequences, and refuse to deal with our sin, so sin takes us over? How often we see those who are responsible for justice overlook justice and guilt? If we do not deal with sin, it will take us out, as sin produces all of the disasters of life.
- Pilate did not want to kill Jesus; but, he let the leaders manipulate him to stoop to their will. Pilate was shaken that Jesus claimed to be the Son of God; somehow and someday, Pilate knew this to be true, yet still would not let Jesus go. Jesus stood stoic and humble with extreme strength under His control and made that known to Pilate; Pilate still would not do the right thing. He puts Jesus through another mock trial of humiliation and ridicule to see if that would please the leaders; of course, it did not. The leaders had no interest in justice. The leaders had no interest in fair or mock trials. The leaders wanted one thing-- Jesus crucified. Pilate complied and handed Jesus over to death.

- Pilate was trapped among his paranoia, political future, and conviction to do the right thing. Yet, not only did he not find guilt in Jesus, but he actually wanted Him released. He may even have been captivated to a degree, but not enough to turn from his ways; a little conviction was happening, just not enough to do the right thing. This gives us the iconic image of the True Suffering Servant who came to love, redeem, and set us free. What we have from Pilate and, yes, the leaders, is the typical response many throughout the ages have given and will give to Jesus Christ, Lord and Savior of all.
- Ironically, Jesus came to set free the very ones who beat and mocked Him. They beat and mocked Him with the very fists that Jesus Himself created. They beat and mocked the only One who would ever come to give them the undeserved grace of redemption. Jesus was publicly displayed and humiliated for His Love, and the evil religious leaders and wayward crowd called for His crucifixion.

Charges / accusation. This means the law that the accused was supposed to have violated, although a governor did not need an official charge or permission to inflict punishment if a crowd got out of hand, or from a non-Roman citizen to hear and judge a case. In Jesus' case, He violated no law and deserved no condemnation. Romans were concerned with uprisings and treason. The Romans were not concerned with philosophical thinking. The Romans were not concerned with what the Jews saw as the problem--an anti-social Jesus who turned them upside down in their hypocrisy. The Romans were only concerned with public order. Since Jesus claimed to be king, this would have been an act of rebellion, a capital offense. This would be quickly dealt with as there could be no king except Caesar. However, Pilate saw through the pious, fraudulent leaders, and Pilate knew Jesus was innocent. Jesus even testified of His innocence to the Romans in saying His kingdom was not of this world. Thus, Pilate tried to please the people and religious leaders by first punishing Jesus, then trying to set Him free (Matt. 19:7; 26:64; 27:18; Luke 22: 69-71; 23:2; John 10:33; 12:32-33; 18:36-37; Acts 7; 12:1-2; 18:14-15).

King of the Jews? This was the charge the priests brought to incite the Romans because it constituted treason and a capital crime that they would have quickly quenched. This was done so that Rome would do the dirty work of crucifying the Messiah. It does not appear that Pilate was mocking Jesus, rather seeing if He was indeed guilty. The mocking came from the religious leaders (Matt. 2:2; Luke 1:32-33; 19:38; 23:2; John 12:33; 21:19).

Flogged / scourged. This was a long process of whipping. Jesus' hands were tied to a pike above His head. Then, He was brutally whipped with a "flagellum," or a "cattail," which was a short whip of several heavy tentacles, the ends tied with small balls of lead, rocks, or bone fragments. It produced deep, large, painful bruises and intense pain--literally tore the flesh off His back. The purpose? To weaken a person's constitution! It was possible Pilate was having Jesus whipped to please the crowd so he would not have to kill Him; subjects were routinely whipped and/or beaten prior to crucifixion but not scourged. Jewish law allowed only thirty-nine lashes, Romans allowed it to continue until the soldiers were too tired to continue or they were told to stop (Luke 23:16; 1 Peter 2:24).

Crown of thorns. They pressed a crown of sharp thorns into His scalp, made from the thorny acanthus shrub. These thorns were nasty--a display of utter contempt. The soldiers further mocked Him by placing a scepter, a representation of authority, in His hands, hands that were aching from the leather straps holding Him to the pike as they whipped Him. The beating would press the sharp thorns further into His scalp, causing a lot of bleeding. The soldiers continued to mock our Lord and hit Him across His face. By this time, Jesus would have been unrecognizable (Matt. 27: 27- 44).

Purple / scarlet robe. This was a very expensive garment, perhaps an old, faded one, and a symbol of a prince. This was also the *robe* or cloak of a Roman soldier that was made of mohair, a very harsh, prickly fabric from camels that would have adhered to wounds, further tearing into the flesh! Roman soldiers were vicious and would brutally mock their prisoners, even use the knuckle bones of their victims for dice to play games with to relieve their boredom!

Hail, king of the Jews! *Hail* was the salutation a soldier gave an important commander or Emperor; here, it is extreme sarcasm. The soldiers were acting with a mindset of sadistic sport and contempt towards Jesus! Jesus is the KING of kings! So many people mock Jesus today, even Christians, by chasing pride and foolishness and ignoring Him! Ironically, here is the God-Man, the last Adam who sums up all of humanity at its best to be our example and substitute for sacrifice. The Roman verdict against Jesus was *not guilty*; normally this would have been the last word (Luke 23:4-22; John 18:38).

Carrying / bear his own cross. This was a Roman sign of guilt as sentenced prisoners were stripped naked and then forced to carry their own torture apparatus. Here, Jesus the Innocent carries and bears our guilt of sin and covers us with His blood.

Jesus was obedient even unto death! Jesus was crucified with crucifixion being the most tortuous, atrocious torment imaginable; the pain inflicted is beyond comprehension. Yet, Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ walked up to it and endured the crucifixion and pain of the entire creation when He could have easily walked away.

The Skull... Golgotha. This was outside of the city wall, as it was custom that official capital crimes for Jews and Romans be executed outside of the city. Jesus was unable to carry the load due to the severe beatings He had endured, so Simon was drafted to do so, a common Roman practice to enlist help. Beside the road, watching, would have been the families, friends, and all the towns people, either enjoying or being terrified by the show. After the procession, the victim was nailed to the crossbeam. His arms may have been tied down, also. Then the person, attached to the crossbeam, was lifted, and the crossbeam was placed in the notched cutout toward the top of the pike part of the cross, and tied in. Now, we have our quintessential Easter scene, the end of the Passion of our Lord and the beginning of His saving grace extended to us (Lev. 24:14-23; Num. 15:56-36; Deut. 17:5; 21:19-21; 22:24; Mark 15:21; Luke 4:29; Acts 7:58; Heb. 13:12).

Crucified him. Jesus was nailed onto the crossbeam through His wrists (not hands because the person would easily slipped off the cross), with large, heavy, square, wrought iron nails approximately the size of railroad spikes. These spikes were driven through the body and deep into the wood of the cross. Several soldiers, using large wooden forks, ladders, or ropes, lifted him up to the top of the ten foot pole. The sensation and pain of these spikes being driven through would have been indescribable. The soldiers would have been careful not to pull the arms tightly, but allow them some movement. The crossbeam was placed in the notch and tied. His left foot was pressed backward against a block used as a sadistic footrest, to prolong the crucifixion. Then, with knees extended, feet on top of each another, toes facing down, one spike was used to nail through the arches of His feet into the bottom block. The knees were left bent so they could flex. During this incredible agony, the pain would be overwhelming, causing Jesus to slip in and out of consciousness--another type and shadow as the Passover lambs being slaughtered during this time were hung up on wood pikes with iron hooks and then filleted (Matt. 27: 27- 44).

It is finished. "Tetelestai" meaning completed. The debt has been paid for humanity's salvation; there is no longer a penalty for sin. Jesus voluntarily, by His act of self-sacrifice and will, paid it in full for us--we who are completely undeserving! The worst tribulation a person could ever face, the great pain Jesus endured of taking on *the sin of the entire* world and appeasing God's wrath for our sin, is now over as Jesus is about to die. He summoned the remnants of His energy to again press His torn feet against the spike and straighten His legs to take a deep breath so to utter His last and final cry, perhaps no more than an agonized whisper, "*It is finished,*" and "*Father! Into thy hands I commit my spirit / ghost.*" His mission to redeem our souls was accomplished and later proven when He arose from the grave to proclaim our call to tell the world. *Scripture might be fulfilled.* Most of this passage is a fulfillment of Psalm 22. (Isa. 53:12; Matt. 27:46-50; Mark 15:34-37; Luke 43-46; John 2:19; 10:17; Heb. 1:3; 9:11-12, 25-28).

When we look upon the cross as the iconic representation of our faith and the crucifixion it stands for, we have to realize it was once something quite different. It was an icon for what was, at one time, the most brutal torture ever conceived. It was a symbol of absolute terror. The Romans, who acquired the practice from the Arabians, Carthaginians, and Persians, would set these crosses up within the city limits of pre-conquered areas and randomly crucify some of their inhabitants, just to keep the others in line.

Jesus chose to endure through the most heinous suffering a person could experience. How does this affect you? What can you do to be appreciative of our Lord? How will this affect the way you live your life and treat others?

According to physiologists, Jesus did not die from suffocation as most victims of crucifixion did. Rather, He had *cardiac rupture* or *cardio respiratory* failure, associated *hypovolemia*, *hyperemia*, and an altered coagulated state. Also, friable (brittle), non-infective, thrombotic vegetations could have formed on the aortic or mitral valve, and been aggravated by His state of exhaustion and the severity of the scourging. Jesus died of heart failure! This is evidenced by the presence of water, which is caused by the shock and constriction of the cardiac tissues being filled by fluid from the pericardium.

The important aspect is not how Jesus died, but that He died for you and me!

Key Takeaway: Our Lord and Savior paid the ultimate price for our sins on what we now call "Good Friday." It was good because of what Christ did for our sins and soul. This is "The Passion of Christ" where Jesus validated the fulfillment of prophecy (Zech. 13:7; Luke 22:37; 24:44-46). We should have been put in His place; yet, He took our place in life, in suffering, and then in death to give us new life. Do you realize the magnitude of what our Lord did for you? He, who was without sin, covered you with His righteousness. These events took place at dawn; so, from the arrest to the crucifixion was an "all-nighter" for Jesus--a time of no rest and constant torture. (Gen. 3:18; Isa. 50:6; 52:14-53-6; Matt.27; Mark 15)!

Consider the cost! How much is it worth to have a life freed from the punishment of sin and receive eternal salvation? Money? Power? Works? What would you pay? Consider it was a payment of life, like giving up a precious relative so you can have a new car, yet many fold more. With sin, all we will have is quarreling, jealousy, anger, selfishness, envy, pride, and such, as these so-called Jewish leaders modeled. The results of these will cause chaos and strife to any situation, and hinder God's work in us.

The Call to the Church? It is all about the Blood of Christ! Not focusing on the Cross will cause us to focus on pride. Thus, division will be wedged into any church or relationship focusing our will and desires over His, preventing our receiving of any good or pleasing work, as well as any blessings. It will prevent God from using us to the fullest extent possible, especially in helping others. We will not be real, functioning Christians when we have pride or focus on pleasing others and not pleasing Christ. We have to be willing to counteract these rotten works by committing to the good fruit, keeping our goals, and focusing upon Christ and His Word, so we can develop them (Prov. 6:32-35; Rom. 8:29).

Questions to Ponder

1. Have you ever struggled with displaying bravery over compromising, even in the face of adversity?
2. Do you realize the cost, the magnitude of what our Lord did for you? What did it take for you to turn you away from sin and to Him?
3. Pilate may have been a bit captivated by Jesus, but why do you think it was not enough for him to do the right thing?
4. How do you see Jesus demonstrating His love? How do you see man at his worst here?
5. How do you feel that as we do our worst, God shows Himself by doing His best?
6. Read Psalm 22, and then read Matthew 27; what do you see?
7. Why is the cross pivotal for the real Christian faith? What would your life be like without it? What would your life be like with more understanding of it?
8. How is it ironic that those who desperately wanted a Messiah, when He came, killed Him? How do the church and our leaders do this today? What can we do to not kill Jesus away from our life and church?
9. Why is it to our benefit that Jesus stayed nailed to the cross for our sins? How do you feel about the fact that Jesus took your place in punishment for your sin?
10. Pilate placated the crowd instead of taking a stand to do the right thing. How have you done this? What can you do to prevent this from happening in your life?
11. How do you suppose most Christians you know would react to fully understanding that our Lord and Savior endured tremendous physical suffering on their behalf? What about you?
12. Is your deepest desire in life and pleasure in living dedicated to please Christ? Can you take a hard look at your life and see how others see you, how God sees you?