

LESSON 3

“But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5).

Crucifixion

Matthew 27:33-36; Mark 15:20-25;
Luke 23:33; John 19:17, 18

No words in the English language are more meaningful than “the cross”! Therefore, we must approach the study of the cross with trembling hearts. It must be a lifelong study for all those who have been saved by it.

Crucifixion! How brutal, barbaric, cruel, and inhumane! Probably, it was invented by Persians and was later perfected by the Romans.

In time, Rome became infamous for its crucifixions. This method of execution was the ultimate form of humiliation. Rome did not crucify Romans. Likewise, the Jews despised crucifixion (Deuteronomy 21:23; Galatians 3:13); it was never their practice. Animals today are not treated as Jesus was.

Modern civilization refuses crucifixion, yet most of the world practices capital punishment. Where capital punishment is still practiced, it is generally done as quickly, painlessly, and humanely as possible.

The scourging! Flogging was a legal preliminary in almost every Roman execution. Jesus prophesied that He would be scourged in connection with His sufferings (Matthew 20:17–19; Mark 10:32–34; Luke 18:31–34). He was!

Scourging was brutal and unbelievably torturous. We cannot grasp the intensity of this type of Roman punishment. It produced great welts, deep stripes, and a swollen body. Often, eyes and teeth were knocked out. Some men died from it. Scourging, however, was not for execution. The whip was for punishment; the nails were for death. Hardened, experienced Roman soldiers knew when to stop. This whipping did not lessen the pain of crucifixion; it enhanced it.

Pilate had Jesus scourged (Matthew 27:26; Mark 15:15; John 19:1), hoping to gain the sympathetic support of the people when they saw the lacerated, bleeding Jesus. He said to the crowd, “Behold, the Man!” (John 19:5). Pilate’s ruse did not work. Neither Jesus nor Pilate got any sympathy.

The dying! Crucifixion stripped people of their human dignity. Basically, crucifixion was used to kill a man and yet keep him alive as long as possible. In public view, a man was left naked (for all practical purposes), helpless, and open to abuse. Even with all this pain, men could live for days. Most lived two or three days. What horror! Oddly, there was not a great blood loss. No major arteries were affected. However, it was difficult to breathe. It was harder to exhale than to inhale. A man would push with his legs to breathe, which increased the pain from the nails. Death resulted primarily from hypovolemic shock and asphyxia exhaustion. When the legs were broken, victims would die within minutes.

The word “excruciating” literally means “out of the cross.” Movement on the cross increased one’s misery. There was no comfortable position on a cross. The pain was immense. Headaches, burning thirst, spasms of muscles and nerves—a million constant shocks were brought to the body. None of us can even vaguely imagine what crucifixion was like.

The wounds! There are only five ways a person can be wounded. Jesus absorbed all five. (1) The contused wound involved bruises from fists and blunt instruments (Matthew 26:67; Mark 14:65; Luke 22:63). (2) The lacerated wound came with scourging. (3) The penetrating wound came from a sharp-pointed instrument. The soldiers crammed a crown of thorns upon His head (Matthew 27:29). (4) The perforated wound came when “. . . they pierced [His] hands and [His] feet” (Psalm 22:16). The hands could not bear the weight of the body. The nails went through His wrists, which are part of the hands. (5) The incised wound took place to make sure He was dead when a soldier pierced Jesus with a spear (John 19:34).

The Roman soldiers would not leave the victim until they were sure of his death. The spear confirmed that Jesus was dead! The Gospels clearly declare that Jesus died on the cross.

The Scriptures place very little emphasis upon the pain and suffering that Jesus experienced. The Gospels avoid the horror as much as possible. Nothing is said about Jesus' crying. Sinners are saved by Jesus' death, not by His pain. Still, the sufferings were clearly present. The cross was a silent death; victims did not have the strength or the breath to scream. The scourging was called the "little death"; crucifixion was called the "big death." Study carefully Isaiah 53. Do not allow your heart to become insensitive to the pain of the cross. Never allow yourself to get over the shock of its horror!

*The cross . . .
there is no other way!*

Six Hours, 1

Matthew 27:33-44; Mark 15:22-33;
Luke 23:32-43; John 19:15-27

"When they came to the place called The Skull, there they crucified Him and the criminals, one on the right and the other on the left" (Luke 23:33).

Six hours! Salvation . . . life . . . hope . . . heaven! Jesus was on the cross for six hours (Mark 15:25; Matthew 27:42-50; see Mark 15:30-37; Luke 23:44-46). The third hour until the ninth hour (Jewish time) is equivalent to 9:00 a.m. until 3:00 p.m. These six hours can be equally divided. God divided them. God sent utter darkness from the sixth to the ninth hours (Matthew 27:45; Mark 15:33; Luke 23:44). Jesus died at the ninth hour.

The death of Jesus is the most famous death in all history. It is all that Christianity has, wants, or needs. Paul wrote, "For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2). This is the heart of all that Paul knew and all that he preached (1 Corinthians 1:17-25).

Details Not Told

We know so little! Details are few. John was the only apostle to witness the crucifixion, but he never opened his mouth at the cross. Luke (the historian) reduced the cross to one short sentence in one verse: "There they crucified Him" (Luke 23:33b). We know more about His burial than His crucifixion. We have more questions than answers.

We do not know the shape of the cross. The "X" shaped cross is out of the question. There is also the Tau cross, which looks like our capital "T." Since Pilate had a sign placed above Jesus' head, this, too, is eliminated. The Latin cross, shaped like a plus sign, is probably what was used. It is the universal cross that has been widely accepted and placed in art, jewelry, and architecture. Anecdotally, the plus sign is called "the sign of the cross."

Pilate wrote a sign and placed it above Jesus on the cross (Matthew 27:37; Mark 15:26; Luke 23:38; John 19:19). Each account of it is different, but they all say the same thing. The writers were not interested in the exact words, but in the message that was given through them.

How was Jesus nailed to the cross? We do not know. We do know that, once He was on the cross, onlookers jeeringly demanded that He come down (Matthew 27:39-43; Mark 15:29-32). The thieves being crucified with Him joined in the ridicule (Matthew 27:44; Luke 23:39). We also know that, as Jesus was dying for the sins of the world, soldiers gambled for His robe (Matthew 27:35; Mark 15:24; John 19:23, 24). How full of sorrow the cross is!

We know the day Jesus was resurrected: the first day, Sunday (Matthew 28:1; Mark 16:2, 9; Luke 24:1-7; John 20:1-10). There is no argument here. The early church assembled on that same day of the week (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2).

However, the day of the crucifixion is not named specifically. To find that day, we must count backwards. Ten times the Gospels refer to Jesus' being raised on "the third day" (See Matthew 16:21; 17:23; 20:19; 27:63; Mark 9:31; 10:34; Luke 9:22; 13:32; 18:33; 24:7,40). Although the timing is debated, the Bible clearly says the crucifixion day was the preparation day, that is, the day before the Sabbath (Mark

15:42; John 19:31; Luke 23:50–56).

We know how long Jesus was on the cross: six hours. These hours are the wedge in the center of time.

The First Three Hours

Six hours! Immediately, Jesus was offered vinegar with gall (Matthew 27:34; KJV; Mark 15:23). Amazing! He rejected it. Jesus refused a painkiller. He did not want anesthetic. He would keep His full senses upon the cross. He would not numb the pain at the price of His faculties. Pain and agony were not issues at the cross. Jesus was the only person at the cross who knew what was taking place.

No sooner was He on the cross than the people chanted for Him to come down (Matthew 27:39–44; Mark 15:29–32; Luke 23:35–40). The thieves joined in also (Matthew 27:44; Mark 15:28, 32; Luke 23:39–41). What defiant cynicism! This demonstrated the ultimate depravity of unbelief, of disbelief. How dare man tell God the conditions on which he will believe! If Jesus had come down from the cross, sinners would have been condemned and without hope. Jesus was born to die. He died that we might be born to live (Romans 5:10). God, righteous and holy as He is, cannot forgive anyone without punishing the sin. At Calvary, Jesus bore the punishment for our sin.

Even forgiven sins have consequences. Jesus asked God not to count this sin against His tormentors; however, theirs was the sin of sins! God destroyed Jerusalem. In its biblical history, Judaism existed for one thing—the coming of the Messiah. Jesus came, fulfilling all the Messianic prophecies. They crucified Him! Ironically, this put them out of the “Messiah business.” The Jews rejected God as their King, accepting Caesar (John 19:14, 15). They fell further by placing Jesus’ blood upon themselves and, to add to their sin, upon their children (Matthew 27:25).

As Jesus was dying for the sins of all mankind, it was only fitting for Him to forgive a sinner. Study the exchange in Luke 23:39–43. A thief found true religion while being executed. Amazing! We must learn to count. We have one Lord, two thieves, three crosses, four garments, five wounds, *six hours*, and seven statements from Jesus. Study and reread the cross. Come to the cross, and stay at the cross. The cross saved the thief; the cross can save us! Man cannot be saved by ideas, thoughts, philosophies, mysticisms, or ignorance—only Jesus can save him.

Although dying in intense pain, Jesus took care of His mother. He told John to care for her as his mother (John 19:26, 27). Many think John “adopted” her for the rest of her life. Stop and think. Two of her sons wrote New Testament books (James and Jude). Mary and some of her sons were at the prayer service in the upper room in Jerusalem soon after Jesus’ resurrection (Acts 1:13, 14). It is obvious that they would take care of their mother’s future needs. Mary needed help *at the cross*—right at the foot of the cross, at the time of the cross! This was her hardest day, her longest night. Jesus was saying, “Stay with My mother!”

Every Jewish girl prayed to be the mother of the Messiah. Mary must have been thrilled that God had chosen her (Luke 1:26–38). She also must have been intimidated by the challenge. This was God’s only begotten Son! What was it like to rear Him? Mary paid a tremendous price to be Jesus’ mother. The aged prophet Simeon had blessed Joseph, Mary, and the baby Jesus. He had also told Mary that a sword would pierce her soul (Luke 2:34, 35). We are not surprised to see Mary at that cross. That is how mothers are. Still, the cross was far from her understanding! She stood heartbroken and bewildered. Jesus comes to us at a price too. Many refuse to pay that price, but Mary lovingly did.

Mary, in hearts today, is either banished or deified. Both views are wrong. Although she was Jesus’ mother, she had to be saved as all sinners do. She did not receive a divinely privileged position. She and the brothers of Jesus were redeemed by Jesus’ blood the same way all others are. There was no fanfare for the family of Jesus. After Acts 1, Mary drops out of the Scriptures. Her Son had become her Savior!

The cross shouted to Mary as it shouts to us, “Life is not futile . . . failure is not fatal . . . death is not final!”

Golgotha is ugly. Crucifixion is more ghastly than the cinema could ever picture. God did what only a Father full of love could do. He allowed His Son to bear the divine judgment of sin; He hid His face from His Son.

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there is no other way!*