

Episode #943 Matthew 27 Part 5-God on a Cross

I. The purpose of the gospel of Matthew is to present Jesus as the Christ, the King of Israel. It is another grand treatise like John to prove to Israel Who Jesus really is. It is the book of being “in Israel,” in contrast to believers today who are “in Christ.”

II. Pilate, having been outmaneuvered by the deceitful religious leaders, gave in and condemned the Lord to death at their demand. The death the Lord was to die was the terrible death of crucifixion.

III. Crucifixion was one form of capital punishment. The Roman method of capital punishment was to behead a man. This was a quick, certain, and sure way of death. In one second, it was over with. Once the sword would pierce the spinal cord, the man would know nothing. The Jewish method of capital punishment was to stone a man to death. This was quick too, because the first stone was the big stone, and it was to hit a man in such a way and in such a place, as he lay prostrate on the ground, that the shock action on the heart would bring a total blackout, if not death. It was not as brutal as it sounds. But the final method the Romans had devised of crucifixion was reserved for slaves and those guilty of especially brutal and notorious crimes. It was to hang or impale a man on a stake with a crosspiece, drive nails through his hands and feet, and then let him hang there until he died. For strong and healthy men this would sometimes take days, running on and on. It was the most brutal method of capital punishment that men had ever devised. This was crucifixion.

IV. The Lord Jesus Crucified. Matthew 27:32-38.

A. Verse 32. According to Roman law, their soldiers were authorized to compel anyone they chose to carry a burden for them for exactly one mile, meaning 1,000 paces. The cross would be a particularly bad thing to be compelled to carry, however! The traditional idea is that the Lord had stumbled and been unable to continue, but the Bible gives no evidence of this. Yet He was probably in such poor shape from all the beatings that the soldiers decided to do this, and that He stumbled seems possible.

1. In the act of crucifixion, the criminal was compelled to carry his own cross out to the place of execution. When people would see a man carrying his cross, they would think this must be a very bad man who was guilty of some enormous crime. Often such criminals were mocked and spit upon. This has led many to imagine that that was the case with the Lord, but our only commentary on that, Luke 23:27-31, says that the people were bewailing and lamenting. They at last had learned what had happened to the Lord, but too late to do anything about it. The common people had not rejected Him.
2. “Cross” is the Greek *stauros*, which means technically “stake,” causing some people to doubt there was a crosspiece. Some argue the cross was a pagan symbol, but as far as I can tell it was the ankh. Early Christianity did not use the cross as their symbol, as might be expected, but the fish. Yet our historical evidence indicates that there was, and since per John 20:25 there were nails (plural) in His hands, it does appear they were separated, as they would be on a crosspiece. If the Greek word for a cross was not *stauros*, what was it?

B. Verse 33. “Golgotha” is an Aramaic name, the common language in Israel, meaning Skull Place; the Hebrew was *Gulgoleth*. It was probably called this because one time someone had discovered a human skull there. That is how these places got their names. Touching a piece of a body made one unclean and unable to enter the temple

- for worship. It did not have to look like a skull or be shaped like a skull, as some have speculated. “Skull” is translated “Calvary” in Luke 23:33, the only place this word appears in our translation. Yet the Greek word is *kranion*, not Calvary. Calvary comes from the Latin word for a skull *calvaria*, so this is another word we inherited from the Roman church, and is not a Biblical name for the place at all.
- C. Verse 34. The Lord was given drink five times during His crucifixion, this being the second. The first was on the way to Golgotha in Mark 15:23, and was wine mixed with myrrh. The second time was here before crucifying Him, sour wine mingled with gall. The third was when He was on the cross in Luke 23:36, and was just sour wine. The fourth is also in Matthew, in 27:48, and was also just sour wine. The final was as He was crying out at the end in John 19:29, and was also just sour wine.
1. “Sour wine” is the Greek *oxos*, and probably refers to a mixture of either sour wine or vinegar and water. This was a common drink of the Roman soldiers, and would have been what they had on hand.
 2. “Gall = the Greek is *cholE*, which means a bitter thing. The reference here is probably to myrrh, which was used for its stupefying quality. This kind of drink they often gave to pacify the victim during the act of crucifixion.
 3. He apparently tried it and then refused it. “Would” is the Greek *thelO*, He did not will in the sense of wish or desire to drink it. Though this may have made the process easier for Him, He would not allow it. He was taking on the full measure of punishment for our sins, and would not dull His ability to suffer by means of this drug.
- D. Verse 35. “They” means the Roman soldiers at the command of the weakling Pilate, who was urged on by the chief priests and elders of the people. As we said earlier, the dividing up of His personal effects was the means by which these soldiers were remunerated for this odorous chore. John 19:23 tells us that His undergarment was made without seam, woven from the top throughout. To tear this would be to unravel and ruin it. Thus they must cast lots for it, rather than splitting it. David both spoke (sang) and wrote this psalm. We do not usually think of David as a prophet, but since he wrote God’s words, he was. “Fulfilled” means filled full or completed. Here we would think that this was the definitive fulfillment of David’s word in Psalm 22:18, as this Psalm contains a stunning prediction of the Lord’s suffering on the cross.
- E. Verse 36. “Kept watch” means they guarded Him. Of course, they would not allow anyone to disturb or rescue those on the cross, and so they watched Him closely.
- F. Verse 37. Pilate had written an accusation and placed it on the cross himself back in John 19:19, in slightly different words: “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.” The chief priests highly disliked this accusation, however, and protested against it in John 19:21-22. It may be Pilate wrote a new accusation to take its place because of this argument. If so, he did not change much.
1. The “accusation” listed the cause, reason, or charge of crime. It was customary to write the crime of which a man was guilty and to nail it on the upright stake that would rise above his head. This helped the cross as a deterrent. Those passing by on the highway, for crosses were generally erected near major highways, would see the terrible suffering of those on the cross and shudder, thinking, “I never want that to happen to me.” Then, they

could read the charge and know just what it was they must not do in order to avoid being crucified in the same way.

2. That is the accusation that they wrote there. There was no other accusation Pilate could make, so this is what he wrote. Perhaps he was trying to get one back at the religious leaders who had defeated him. That is what men would have seen on the cross as the reason He was there. Yet one thing that men could not see there that day but that God could see was your sins, my sins, and the sins of the world. That is what Colossians 2:14 means about the handwriting of ordinances against us. We were guilty. The decree against us is written in Romans 3:22-23. That is what was written against us as a true bill. Yet it was an erasable writing, for that is what "handwriting" in Colossians 2:14 means. And it was erased, for Christ died for our sins and we have forgiveness by His grace and redemption through His blood, Ephesians 1:7. What men saw there and what God saw there were two different things.

V. Conclusion: Crucifixion was a most cruel and sadistic means of torture. The Lord did not die for us a simple death, but a most humiliating and excruciating one. Do we realize the depths of our Creator's love expressed in what He went through to redeem us from our guilt? Let us see this truth and be thankful, loving this Lord Who gave so much for us!