

## Easter Teaching No. 11

### Crucifixion

The date was 15<sup>th</sup> Nisan 30 AD or our equivalent of 7<sup>th</sup> April AD 30

Matt 27:31-34

Jesus carried his own cross however prisoners would not normally be scourged beforehand and Jesus so was greatly weakened by the flogging, and a bystander, Simon of Cyrene was compelled by the soldiers to carry Jesus' cross.

Cyrene is in North Africa and so Simon had obviously travelled to Jerusalem for the Passover. Mark 15:21 tells us that he was the father of Alexander and Rufus and this is significant as later on. Mark's gospel was written to the Romans and later when Paul wrote to the Romans in Romans 16:13 there is mention of a man called Rufus. The church in Rome was not founded by Paul but by believers. Did this man Simon become a believer in Jesus as the Messiah and then travel to Rome, taking his family with him, and help to found the church there, and was it significant that Paul mentioned him because of his father's role in carrying the cross of Jesus?

Luke 23:27-31

A common practice of the day was professional wailers and lamenters, women who would follow the procession of those who were to be executed. However Jesus turns to them and says 'Weep for yourselves and for your children' alluding to the curse they took upon themselves when the crowd outside the Praetorium called for his crucifixion, and told Pilate that Jesus' blood would be upon them and their children. The outworking of this curse came to its climax with the destruction of the Temple and the City in AD70.

Then the procession arrived at Golgotha, the place of the skull, more particularly meaning the place of execution. According to archaeological evidence, the site of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem is actually the site of ancient Golgotha and would have been where Jesus and others were crucified.

Before crucifixion took place, all those condemned for execution were offered an analgesic mixture of wine mingled with gall and myrrh. This would have rendered them lightheaded or even unconscious whilst the nailing procedure took place. However Mark 15:23 tells us that Jesus refused this drink and so would have been fully conscious for the crucifixion itself.

And so at 9 o'clock in the morning (or the third hour) the special Passover Lamb - the Chagigah - was being sacrificed in the Temple by the priests, at the same time Jesus, our Passover lamb was being nailed to the cross.

I have summarised this article which I found on The Christian Broadcasting Network which quote material from Dr Pierre Barebet, a French surgeon who has done exhaustive historical and experimental research on the subject of crucifixion and has written extensively on it: I summarise his works as follows:

"The first known practice of crucifixion was by the Persians and it was Alexander the Great who brought this practice back to the Mediterranean world. The Romans learned it from the Carthaginians and rapidly developed a high degree of efficiency and skill at it.

The prisoner would have not carried his complete cross, but rather the cross piece, the patibulum from the prison to the execution site. This would normally have weighed about 110 pounds and would have been impossible for Jesus to have carried the 650 yards to the crucifixion site of Golgotha because of the scourging beforehand. He would have been bleeding and sweating with the cold, clammy sweat of shock. A bystander, Simon is ordered to carry the crosspiece.

Once at the execution site, Simon is ordered to place the patibulum on the ground and Jesus is quickly thrown backward by the soldiers with his shoulders against the wood. The legionnaire feels for the depression at the front of the wrist and drives a heavy, square wrought iron nail through the wrist and deep into the wood. Quickly he moves to the other side and repeats the action, being careful not to pull the arms too tightly but to allow some flexion and movement. The patibulum is then lifted into place.

The left foot is now pressed backward against the right foot and with both feet extended, toes down, a nail is driven through the arch of each, leaving the knees moderately flexed. The victim is now crucified.

As he slowly sags down with more weight on the nails in the wrists, excruciating pain shoots along the fingers and up the arms to explode in the brain, the nails in the wrists are putting pressure on the median nerves.

As he pushes himself upward to avoid this stretching torment, he places his full weight on the nail through his feet. Again there is the searing agony of the nail tearing through the nerves between the metatarsal bones of the feet.

At this point, as the arms fatigue, great waves of cramps sweep over the muscles, knotting them in deep, relentless, throbbing pain. With these cramps comes the inability to push himself upward. Hanging by his arms, the pectoral muscles are paralysed and the intercostal muscles are unable to act. Air can be drawn into the lungs but cannot be exhaled. Finally carbon dioxide builds up in the lungs and in the blood stream and the cramps partially subside.

Spasmodically, he is able to push himself upward to exhale and bring in the life-giving oxygen.

Jesus experienced hours of limitless pain, cycles of twisting, joint-rending cramps, intermittent partial asphyxiation, searing pain where tissue is torn from his lacerated back as he moves up and down against the rough timber.

Then another agony begins, a terrible crushing pain deep in the chest as the pericardium slowly fills with serum and begins to compress the heart. The loss of tissue fluids has reached a critical level; the compressed heart is struggling to pump heavy, thick sluggish blood into the tissue; the tortured lungs are making a frantic effort to gasp in small gulps of air. The markedly dehydrated tissues send their flood of stimuli to the brain.

The body of Jesus is now in extremes and he can feel the chill of death creeping through his tissues.

The common method of ending a crucifixion was by crurifracture, the breaking of the bones of the legs. This prevented the victim from pushing himself upward; the tension could not be relieved from the muscles of the chest and rapid suffocation occurred.

However this was not necessary in the case of Jesus. He had already died. To make doubly sure of Jesus' death, the legionnaire drove his lance through the fifth interspace between the ribs, upward through the pericardium and into the heart. There was an escape of water fluid from the sac surrounding the heart, giving post mortem evidence that our Lord died not the usual crucifixion death by suffocation, but of heart failure (broken/ruptured heart) due to shock and constriction of the heart by fluid in the pericardium'. "

This is a shocking account of what Jesus had to endure whilst on the cross. The pain and suffering this method of execution caused to the victim. Death must have been a blessed release.

Let's find out more of what happened when Jesus was crucified.