

Easter Teaching No. 12

Hanging on the Cross

John 19:18-27, Matthew 27:35

After Jesus was hoisted up on the cross the soldiers went to divide his garments between them. Four soldiers would have been assigned to crucify him and these soldiers would divide the convicts clothing between them. This was considered to be the spoils of crucifixion.

Jewish men in those days wore five items of clothing: (1) The upper garment, also called the outer garment, (2) the under garment, also called the inner garment, (3) a head covering, (4) shoes or sandals and (5) the robe, or outer coat, which was the one which had the largest single piece of cloth.

The soldiers saw that Jesus robe, or outer coat was an expensive one and of good quality, they therefore cast lots for his robe, and one soldier would have won. This was in fulfilment of Psalm 22: 18 'They divide my clothes amongst them and cast lots for my garment'.

Pilate then had an inscription fixed onto the cross, above Jesus' head (making it a superscription). This was called a 'titulus' and would have been written on parchment, displaying the crime of the person crucified for all those around him to read. However the charge against Jesus read more like a statement, it was written in Hebrew, Latin and Greek so that all could read and understand it.

Matthew 27:37 'This is Jesus, The King of the Jews'.

John 19:21 The religious leaders went to Pilate and asked him to change the superscription from 'The King of the Jews' to 'this man claimed to be the King of the Jews'. Pilate answered 'I have written what I have written'.

Did Pilate do this as revenge to the religious leaders as they had made him crucify a man contrary to both law and to his judgement, or did he truthfully have an inclination that this man could just be who he said he was?

Two men were crucified each side of Jesus. They are commonly referred to as 'robbers', but robbery was not a capital offence. It is very likely however that these men were of the party of Barabbas and were guilty of insurrection and sedition. Luke uses the word for 'criminal' in his account (Luke 23:32).

To start with both of these men crucified alongside Jesus mocked him:-

Luke 21:39 'Are you not the Messiah! Save yourself and us!' But the other criminal rebuked him. 'Don't you fear God since you are under the same sentence? We are being punished justly for we are getting what our deeds deserve, but this man has done nothing wrong.' Then he said ' Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom'. Jesus answered him, 'Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise'.

What a wonderful conversion: even though this criminal was dying he recognised that he himself was a sinner and that Jesus was not. Although Jesus was dying alongside him, he believed that Jesus could still save him. He recognised Jesus for who he truly was, the Messiah. He must have believed that although his Messiah was dying, he would have the power to come back to life and set up his kingdom. This is a clear picture of God's grace in action.

Although Jesus was in agony, fastened to the cross, bleeding and dying this did not arouse any form of compassion from the crowds. They jeered and mocked and laughed. The site of the crucifixion was near a main road leading into Jerusalem. On Passover morning the city gates were open and traffic flowed in and out of the city. Those walking by could read the superscription on the cross.

Mark 15:29-32

"Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, 'So you who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, come down from the cross and save yourself. In the same way the chief priests and the teachers of the law mocked him among themselves ' He saved others, but he cannot save himself. Let this Messiah, this king of Israel, come down from the cross, that we may see and believe'. Those crucified with him also heaped insults upon him."

Herod and Pilate together with their soldiers had already mocked and abused him. Representatives of every type of citizen in Jerusalem from religious and political rulers, high standing officials, ordinary people, and criminals - they all mocked Jesus cruelly and yet he did not respond at all to their jeers.

Jesus did speak from the cross... we will see that in our next study.