

The Suffering of Our Lord

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As Easter approaches, I am reminded of the crucifixion and the suffering that our Lord went through for us. Most people know about the last 24 hours of Jesus' life, but I believe that they really don't understand what really happened.

In a nutshell, the events of the story go something like this:

- During the Passover meal, Jesus informs His disciples that one of them will betray Him. He indicates that it will be Judas Iscariot.
- Judas then leaves to get the Roman guards.
- Jesus and the remaining disciples go to the Garden of Gethsemane where Jesus prays vehemently until He sweats blood.
- Judas returns with guards who, in turn, arrest Jesus.
- Jesus is tried and found guilty.
- Jesus is beaten and mocked.
- Jesus is nailed to the cross and crucified.
- Jesus is buried and in three days He arises

We are all told that Jesus died for our sins. We hear this so often that I believe some people begin to take it for granted. Like living in Washington DC or New York city, or some other great city. We get so accustomed to the great sites in these cities that we often overlook them. But by watching tourist, we once again begin to appreciate what is there.

Therefore, studying closely to what happened during that 24 hour period may bring to light the true love God had for us. After all, He did send His only begotten Son for you and for me.

After the Passover meal, Jesus and His disciples went to the Mount of Olives, specifically to the Garden of Gethsemane. While there, Jesus went to pray alone in the Garden. He prayed that God the Father would take away the cup that He was about to drink. Jesus was referring to the suffering He was about to undergo.

Keep in mind that Jesus is 100% man and 100% God. The man in Him feared what was about to happen. The God in Him knew exactly what was going to happen.. This caused tremendous conflict within Him. This great anxiety caused chemicals in His body to break down the capillaries that were in His sweat glands, which caused the sweat to be tinged with blood (Luke 22:44).

This condition, medically known as *hematidrosis*, is associated with high levels of psychological stress. In addition, this would also set up the skin to be very fragile and sensitive.

Can you imagine the stress Jesus must have had for this process to take place?

After His arrest and so-called trial, Jesus was then flogged. Romans were very good at flogging. And they were known to be extremely brutal. Flogging usually consisted of thirty nine lashes, but could be more depending on the soldiers mood at the time.

Dr. Alexander Metherell talks about Roman flogging in Lee Strobel's book The Case for Easter (pp 15-16):

“The soldier would use a whip of braided leather thongs with metal balls woven into them. When the whip would strike the flesh, these balls would cause deep bruises or contusions, which would break open with further blows. And the whip had pieces of sharp bone as well, which would cut the flesh severely.

The back would be so shredded that part of the spine was sometimes exposed by the deep, deep cuts. The whipping would have gone all the way from the shoulders down to the back, the buttocks, and the back of the legs.”

Flogging would tear into the underlying skeletal muscles, producing ribbons of bleeding flesh. Eusebius, a third-century historian, described flogging by saying, “The sufferer's veins were laid bare, and the very muscles, sinews, and bowels of the victim were open to exposure.”

Knowing what the whip consisted of, if Jesus received 39 lashes, then that would be equivalent to 468 individual razors that sliced and shredded his skin off the bones.

Many people would die from flogging alone. Keep in mind that Jesus was already under great psychological stress and had suffered *hematidrosis* only the night before. This type of flogging would put Him into *hypovolemic shock*, meaning that He would be suffering the effects of losing a large amount of blood.

Hypovolemic shock causes several things to happen to the body. First, the heart begins to race, trying to pump blood throughout the body. Secondly, the pressure drops, causing fainting or collapse. Thirdly, the kidney stops producing urine, trying to maintain what fluids it can and fourthly, the person becomes very thirsty. We see evidence in the Gospels that Jesus was suffering from *hypovolemic shock*. On His way to be executed, He collapses and Simon is ordered to carry the cross for Him. Later we read that Jesus said, "I thirst."

After the flogging, a crown of thorns was placed on His head. These thorns were not what are found on rose bushes, but rather they were long, solid ones. When the soldiers placed this crown on Jesus' head, they twisted it as they pushed down, driving the thorns deep into His forehead.

By now, Jesus was in serious to critical condition, and the actual crucifixion hadn't even begun!

Arriving at the site of the crucifixion, Jesus would have been laid down as His arms were outstretched as far as they would go. His hands were then nailed to the horizontal cross-beam, or *patibulum*, of the cross (the vertical piece was permanently set in the ground). The nails, or more accurately 5 to 7 inch long spikes, were driven through the wrists. In the language of the day, the wrists were considered part of the hand. The wrists were stronger and would be able to support the weight of the body, while the actual palms would have torn, allowing the body to fall.

The spikes, when driven through His wrists, would have crushed and torn the median nerve, one of the largest nerves leading to the hand. The pain would have seemed unbearable!

To somewhat imagine this pain, think about what it feels like when you hit your "funny bone." What you are actually striking is the *ulna* nerve, and it is extremely painful when hit. Now picture taking that same nerve and squeezing and twisting it until it breaks. That would be like the pain Jesus felt.

As a side note here, the pain caused by this phase of the crucifixion was so agonizing that the Romans had to invent a word for it – excruciating. The word excruciating literally means 'out of the cross.'

At this point, Jesus would have been hoisted up and the cross-bar would have been attached to the vertical stake in the ground. Additional spikes were then driven through His feet, crushing the nerves there and causing similar pain as to that He had felt from His hands.

Jesus' body then hung from the cross. The weight of His body would have stretched out His arms, probably about six inches or so, causing the shoulders to be dislocated. This, of course, was foretold in Psalm 22:14; "and all my bones are out of joint."

So how does crucifixion work?

Once hanging, death usually comes agonizingly slow by asphyxiation. The reason is that the weight of the body puts stress on the muscles and diaphragm, essentially putting the lungs into the inhale position. In order to exhale, the victim would had to have pushed up with his feet in order for the chest muscles to relax enough for him to exhale. This, of course, would cause the nail to tear through the foot, eventually locking up on the tarsal bone.

After exhaling, the person could then relax and get another breath of air. But to exhale, he would have to go through the whole process again. This pushing up and down would also be taking its toll on the back, which had be stripped of most of the skin. Imagine raw skin rubbing up and down on rough wood!

After a while, exhaustion would set in, and the person would not be able to push himself up anymore in order to breathe. This person would then go into *respiratory acidosis*. This basically means that the carbon dioxide in the blood is dissolved into carbonic acid, which causes the acidity of the blood to increase. This in turn produces an irregular heartbeat and the person eventually dies from cardiac arrest.

The increased heart rate caused by the *hypovolemic shock* would have contributed to heart failure as well. This, in turn, would have produced a collection of fluid around the heart's membrane called a *pericardial effusion*, as well as around the lungs, called a *pleural effusion*.

After Jesus' death, when a spear was thrust into His side by a Roman soldier, clear fluid came pouring out followed by blood. This clear fluid would have been from the *pericardial* and *pleural effusions*. John's account of the crucifixion in the Gospels, fits this scenario perfectly.

To speed up death, the legs were usually broken. By breaking the legs, the victims would not be able to push up to breathe; therefore death would come more quickly. The legs of the two thieves, which were crucified with Jesus, were broken. However Jesus was already dead by the time the soldiers came around, so they didn't have to break His legs, thus fulfilling

an old Testament scripture; “He keepeth all his bones: not one of them is broken” (Psalm 34:20).

It is here that the crucifixion ends. We have seen the suffering that Jesus voluntarily went through. Was His a wasted death? Did His suffering mean anything?

The story continues....

Jesus was then taken down from the cross and was buried in a tomb provided by Joseph of Arimathea. The Sabbath was about to begin, so basically they only had time to place Him in the tomb and seal it up.

The morning after the Sabbath, just as the sun was rising, Mary Magdalene, Mary (the mother of James), Joanna and Salome came to the tomb bringing sweet spices in order to anoint the body of Jesus. They were talking amongst themselves as they were walking, wondering who they could get to help them roll the stone away. As they approached the tomb, their questions were answered.

The stone had been rolled away!

Entering the tomb, the women saw two men who said, “Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen.”

The women then left and reported what they had seen to the other disciples. They did not believe the women at first. It was only after they had seen Jesus themselves, talked with Him, ate with Him, touched Him, that they finally believed. And from this belief, Christianity was born.

There are many people today who either believe that Jesus really did not die on the cross or that He never was resurrected. The truth is He did both. As we saw earlier, the beating and torturing that Jesus went through was enough to kill Him. However the spear through His side confirms that He did die.

The story of the resurrection begins with women finding the empty tomb. In first century Palestine, women could not be used as witnesses, even in the court system. By writing in the Gospels that it was women who found the empty tomb, the disciples were subjected to ridicule and embarrassment. In addition, by spreading the word of a risen Savior, the disciples also faced certain death. And if Jesus hadn't really died, then He would not have been in any condition to inspire His disciples after His crucifixion ordeal.

The location of Jesus' tomb was also well known by both the Jewish council and by the Romans. Since both groups had their own agenda in denouncing Jesus and the new religious movement that He had started, it would have been very easy to show the people a rotting corpse, thus distinguishing the flame even before it would get started.

But this was not the case. Something must have happened in order for the disciples to face ridicule, persecution and death.

That something was Jesus' resurrection!

Jesus died for our sins, but without the resurrection, that death would have been meaningless. Through His resurrection, Jesus has shown that death itself has been conquered. Jesus is the firstfruit (1Corrinthian 15:20). The first to defeat death. Through Him, because of His death and resurrection, we need no longer to fear death. Through Him we have eternal life.

So this Easter, as you sit around eating ham, mashed potatoes, green beans and rolls, keep in mind the sacrifice that was made for you. The suffering that was endured. The agony that happened. And the joy that occurred.