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The Crucifixion of Jesus Christ (Part 2)

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THE CRUCIFIXION OF JESUS CHRIST

FRIDAY-SATURDAY

- **THE OUTLINE**

It would begin shortly before 9:00 a.m. Friday and end sometime Saturday afternoon.

A. The journey of Jesus to Golgotha (Mt. 27:31-34; Mk. 15:20-23; Lk. 23:26-33a; Jn. 19:17)

1. The soldiers compel a man from Cyrene by the name of Simon to carry the cross (Mt. 27:32; Mk. 15:21).
2. Jesus is followed by a large company of women who were weeping over His impending death (Lk. 23:27).
3. He responds by asking them not to sorrow over Him but rather save their tears to lament the future destruction of the city of Jerusalem (Lk. 23:28-31).

B. At the foot of the cross (Mt. 27:34; Mk. 15:23)

1. He is offered vinegar, mingled with gall, meant to help ease the terrible agony which awaited Him, but refused to drink it.
2. He is crucified along with two other condemned men (Lk. 23:33; Mt. 27:28; Jn. 19:18).
3. The chief Jewish rulers, soldiers, and at first, both thieves cruelly mock Him (Mt. 27:39-44; Lk. 23:35-38; Mk. 15:29-31).
4. His garments and special robe are gambled for by the soldiers (Jn. 19:23, 24; Mt. 27:35; Mk. 15:24).
5. Pilate prepared a sign and had it placed atop the cross which read: "THIS IS JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS" (Mt. 27:37; Mk. 15:26; Jn. 19:18-24).
6. Jesus' only followers at the cross were His mother, His mother's sister, the wife of Clopas, Mary Magdalene, and the Apostle John (Jn. 19:25-27).

C. His comments on the cross and subsequent death (Mt. 27:33-61; Mk. 15:24-27; Lk. 23:33-56; Jn. 19:16-42)

1. His first three hours on the cross:

From 9:00 a.m. to noon (Mt. 27:35-44; Mk. 15:24-32; Lk. 23:33b-43; Jn. 19:18-27).

- a. The vicious mocking is intensified (Mt. 27:39-44):

"Oh yes, you were the one who was going to destroy the temple and rebuild it!"

"You claimed to be the Son of God! Well, come down from the cross and prove it!"

“You saved others, but apparently you can’t even save yourself!”

“Face it, God has forsaken you!”

b. Jesus utters His first statement:

“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Lk 23:24).

c. At first, both thieves were reviling Him (Mt. 27:44), but now one, realizing just who Jesus was, rebukes the other thief:

“Stop it! this man is innocent!”

“Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom” (Lk. 23:42).

d. Jesus speaks His second statement:

“Verily I say unto thee, today shalt thou be with me in paradise” (Lk. 23:43).

e. Jesus now turns to both His mother and John the apostle.

f. He speaks His third statement:

“Woman, behold thy son!” (Jn. 19:26) *“Behold thy mother”* (Jn. 19:27).

(These words were addressed to John.)

2. His final three hours on the cross:

3. From noon till 3:00 p.m. (Mt. 27:45-50; Mk. 15:33-37; Lk. 23:44-45a, 46; Jn. 19:28-30)

a. A strange darkness now settled down over the next three hours.

b. Jesus speaks His fourth statement:

“My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Mt. 27:46; Mk. 15:34)

c. Some of the crowd thought He was calling for Elijah (Mt. 27:47; Mk. 15:35).

d. Jesus speaks His fifth statement:

“I thirst” (Jn. 19:28).

e. Jesus speaks His sixth statement:

“It is finished!” (Jn. 19:30b)

f. Jesus receives the vinegar and speaks His seventh statement:

“Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit” (Lk. 23:46).

g. The Roman centurion who saw all this was visibly shaken, glorifying God, and crying out, *“Certainly this was a righteous man”* (Lk. 23:47). *“Truly, this was the Son of God”* (Mt. 27:54).

D. Events following the death of Jesus

1. A confused and possibly guilt-stricken crowd leaves the scene (Lk. 23:48).

2. Pilate gives an order to make certain the deaths of Jesus and the two thieves (Jn. 19:31-37).

The two thieves were still alive but were quickly put to death by the breaking of their legs.

Seeing that Jesus was already dead they pierced His side with a spear just to make sure.

3. Joseph of Arimathaea and Nicodemus ask for and receive permission from Pilate to take down the body of Jesus from the cross (Mt. 27:57-60; Mk. 15:43-46; Lk. 23:50-53).
 - a. The women (Mary Magdalene, Mary [mother of Jesus], and others) prepare His body for burial (Mt. 27:55, 56; Mk. 15:40, 41; Lk. 23:54-56; Jn. 19:25)
 - b. Joseph places Jesus' body in his own new tomb (Mt. 27:60; Lk. 23:53; Jn. 19:41, 42)

E. The supernatural events associated with the crucifixion of Jesus

There were at least four such events:

1. The three-hour darkness from noon till 3:00 p.m. (Mt. 27:45; Mk. 15:33)
2. The tearing of the veil in the temple which separated the holy place from the Holy of Holies (Mt. 27:51a)
3. A powerful, localized earthquake (Mt. 27:51b)
4. The resurrection from the dead of some individuals who *"went into the holy city and appeared unto many"* (Mt. 27:52, 53)

SATURDAY

- **THE OUTLINE**

A. The chief priests and Pharisees meet with Pilate (Mt. 27:62-66).

1. Their request: *"Send soldiers to make the sepulcher of Jesus secure."*
2. Their reason: *"Lest His disciples come and remove the body in an attempt to fulfill Jesus' prophecy that He would rise from the dead."*
3. The response (by Pilate): *"You have my permission, but send your own temple guard."*

- **THE ANALYSIS**

INTRODUCTION: Most Christians are aware of Isaiah chapter 53, where the prophet predicts the awful sufferings of Jesus some seven centuries before Bethlehem in graphic fashion, writing:

"He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed,

and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken.” (Isa. 53:3-8)

In fact the prophet describes the Savior's terrible ordeal in even more brutal fashion at the end of chapter 52:

“Many were amazed when they saw him — beaten and bloodied, so disfigured one would scarcely know he was a person” (52:14, taken from the New Living translation).

The following, somewhat extended material concerning the overall agony, scourging, and crucifixion of Christ is taken from two magazine articles: *New Wine*, December 1972, Dr. C. Truman Davis; and *JAMA (Journal of the American Medical Association)*, March 21, 1988, Dr. William D. Edwards:

A. The physical passion of Christ began in Gethsemane. Of the many aspects of this initial suffering, I shall discuss only the one of psychological interest: the bloody sweat. It is interesting that the physician of the group, St. Luke, is the only one to mention this. He says, *“And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground.” (Lk. 22:44)*

Though very rare, the phenomenon of hematidrosis, bloody sweat, is well documented. Under great emotional stress, tiny capillaries in the sweat glands can break, thus mixing blood with sweat. This process alone could have marked weakness and possible shock. *“Then Pilate therefore took Jesus, and scourged him.” (Jn. 19:1)*

B. Flogging was a legal preliminary to every Roman execution, and only women and Roman senators or soldiers (except in cases of desertion) were exempt. The usual instrument was a short whip (flagrum or flagellus) with several single or braided leather thongs of variable lengths, in which small iron balls or sharp pieces of sheep bones were tied at intervals. Occasionally, staves were also used.

For scourging, the man was stripped of his clothing and his hands were tied to an upright post. The back, buttocks and legs were flogged either by two soldiers (lictors) or by one who alternated positions. The severity of the scourging depended on the disposition of the lictors and was intended to weaken the victim to a state just short of collapse or death.

After the scourging, the soldiers often taunted their victim. As the Roman soldiers repeatedly struck the victim's back with full force, the iron balls would cause deep contusions, and the leather thongs and sheep bones would cut into the skin and subcutaneous tissues.

As the flogging continued, the lacerations would tear into the underlying skeletal muscles and produce quivering ribbons of bleeding flesh. Pain and blood loss generally

set the stage for circulatory shock. The extent of blood loss may well have determined how long the victim would survive on the cross.

At the Praetorium, Jesus was severely whipped. (Although the severity of the scourging is not discussed in the four gospel accounts, it is implied in one of the epistles [1 Pet. 2:24]. A detailed word study of the ancient Greek text for this verse indicates that the scourging of Jesus was particularly harsh.)

It is not known whether the number of lashes was limited to 39, in accordance with Jewish law. When it was determined by the centurion in charge that the prisoner was near death, the beating was finally stopped. The half-fainting Jesus was then untied and allowed to slump to the stone pavement, wet with His own blood.

- C. The Roman soldiers saw a great joke in this provincial Jew claiming to be a king. They threw a robe across His shoulders and placed a stick in His hand for a scepter. They still needed a crown to make their travesty complete. A small bundle of flexible branches covered with long thorns (commonly used for firewood) was plaited into the shape of a crown and was pressed into His scalp. Again, there was copious bleeding (the scalp being one of the most vascular areas of the body).

After mocking Him and striking Him across the face, the soldiers took the stick from His hand and struck Him across the head, driving the thorns deeper into His scalp.

Finally, they tired of their sadistic sport and the robe was torn from His back. This had already become adherent to the clots of blood and serum in the wounds, and its removal, just as in the careless removal of a surgical bandage, caused excruciating pain ... almost as though He were again being whipped— and the wounds again began to bleed. In deference to Jewish custom, the Romans returned His garments.

The heavy horizontal beam of the cross was tied across His shoulders, and the procession of the condemned Christ, two thieves and the execution party walked along the Via Dolorosa.

In spite of His efforts to walk erect, the weight of the heavy wooden beam, together with the shock produced by copious blood loss, was too much. He stumbled and fell. The rough wood of the beam gouged into the lacerated skin and muscles of His shoulders. He tried to rise, but His muscles had been pushed beyond their endurance.

The centurion, anxious to get on with the crucifixion, selected a stalwart North African onlooker, Simon of Cyrene, to carry the cross. Jesus followed, still bleeding and sweating the cold clammy sweat of shock. The 650-yard journey from the fortress Antonia to Golgotha was finally completed. Jesus was once again stripped of His clothes – except for a loincloth which was allowed.

- D. Jesus was offered wine mixed with myrrh, a mild analgesic mixture. He refused to drink. Simon was ordered to place the cross beam on the ground, and Jesus was quickly thrown backward with His shoulders against the wood. The legionnaire felt for the depression at

the front of the wrist. He drove a heavy, square, wrought-iron nail through His wrist and deep into the wood.

Quickly, he moved to the other side and repeated the action, being careful not to pull the arms too tightly, but to allow some flexion and movement. The beam was then lifted in place at the top of the vertical beam with the title reading:

"Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews", and nailed in place. "And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left." (Lk. 23:33)

- E. Although the Romans did not invent crucifixion, they perfected it as a form of torture and capital punishment that was designed to produce a slow death, with maximum pain and suffering. It was one of the most disgraceful and cruel methods of execution and usually was reserved for slaves, foreigners, revolutionaries, and the vilest of criminals. Roman law usually protected Roman citizens from crucifixion.

It was customary for the condemned man to carry his own cross from the logging post to the site of crucifixion outside the city walls. He was usually naked, unless this was prohibited by local customs. Since the weight of the entire cross was probably well over 300 pounds, only the cross bar was carried. The patibulum, weighing 75 to 125 pounds, was placed across the nape of the victim's neck and balanced along both shoulders. Usually, the outstretched arms then were tied to the crossbar.

- F. The procession to the site of the crucifixion was led by a complete Roman military guard, headed by a centurion. One of the soldiers carried a sign (titulus) on which the condemned man's name and crime were displayed. Later, the titulus would be attached to the top of the cross. The Roman guard would not leave the victim until they were sure of his death. Outside the city walls was permanently located the heavy upright wooden stipes, on which the patibulum would be secured.

To prolong the crucifixion process, a horizontal wooden block or plank, serving as a crude seat (sedile or sedulum), often was attached midway down the stipes. At the site of execution, by law, the victim was given a bitter drink of wine mixed with myrrh (gall) as a mild analgesic.

The criminal was then thrown to the ground on his back, with his arms outstretched along the patibulum. The hands could be nailed or tied to the crossbar, but nailing apparently was preferred by the Romans.

- G. Furthermore, ossuary finds, and the Shroud of Turin have documented that the nails commonly were driven through the wrists rather than the palms. Although scriptural references are made to nails in the hands, these are not at odds with the archaeological evidence of wrist wounds, since the ancients customarily considered the wrist to be a part of the hand.

H. After both arms were fixed to the crossbar, the patibulum and the victim, together, were lifted onto the stipes. Next, the feet were fixed to the cross, either by nails or ropes. Ossuary findings and the Shroud of Turin suggest that nailing was the preferred Roman practice. Although the feet could be fixed to the sides of the stipes or to a wooden footrest (*supped-aneum*), they were nailed directly to the front of the stipes. To accomplish this, flexion of the knees may have been quite prominent, and the bent legs may have been rotated laterally.

I. When the nailing was completed, the titulus was attached to the cross, by nails or cords, just above the victim's head.

Jesus Christ was now crucified. As He slowly sagged down with more weight on the nails in the wrist, excruciating, fiery pain shot along His fingers and arms to explode in His brain. The nails in His wrists were putting pressure on the median nerves. As He pushed Himself upward to avoid this stretching torment, He placed His full weight on the nail through His feet. Again, there was the searing agony of the nail tearing through the nerves between the metatarsal bones of His feet. At this point, another phenomenon occurred. As His arms fatigued, great waves of cramps swept over the muscles, knotting them in deep, relentless throbbing pain. With these cramps came the inability to push Himself upward. Hanging by His arms, the pectoral muscles were paralyzed and the intercostal muscles were unable to act. Air could be drawn into the lungs, but He could not exhale.

J. Jesus fought to raise Himself in order to get even one short breath. Finally, carbon dioxide built up in the lungs and in the bloodstream, and the cramps partially subsided. Spasmodically, He was able to push Himself upward to exhale and bring in the life giving oxygen. It was undoubtedly during these periods that He uttered the seven short sentences which were recorded in the Bible.

He suffered hours of this limitless pain, cycles of twisting, joint-rending cramps, intermittent partial asphyxiation, searing pain as tissue was torn from His lacerated back as He moved up and down against the rough timber. Then another agony began. A deep, crushing pain deep in the chest as His pericardium slowly filled with serum, and began to compress His heart.

K. It was now almost over – the loss of tissue fluids had reached a critical level – the compressed heart was struggling to pump heavy, thick, sluggish blood into the tissues – the tortured lungs were making a frantic effort to gasp in small gulps of air. The markedly dehydrated tissues sent their flood of stimuli to His brain.

His mission of atonement had been completed. Finally, He could allow His body to die. With one last surge of strength, He once again pressed His torn feet against the nail, straightened His legs, took a deeper breath, and uttered His seventh and last cry, *"Father, into thy hands I commit My Spirit."*

Having now reviewed the terrible suffering ordeal of Jesus we turn our attention to those sixteen events associated with the cross and the seven statements spoken from the cross.

THE SIXTEEN EVENTS

- A. Jesus is placed on the cross at 9:00 a.m. (Mk. 15:25) between two thieves (Mt. 27:38; Lk. 23:32; Jn. 19:18).
- B. A sign is positioned above the cross which read, *"This is Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews"* (Mt. 27:37; Mk. 15:26; Lk. 23:38; Jn. 19:19). It is ironic to note the following:
 1. At Jesus' birth some wise man asked, *"Where is he that is born King of the Jews?"* (Mt. 2:2)
 2. At Jesus' death, some wicked men announced, *"This is ... the King of the Jews."*
- C. The Jewish leaders complain about the sign to Pilate but he refuses to change it. (Jn. 19:20-22)

Jesus is ridiculed by many:

1. The sarcastic (who they were)

The people (Lk. 23:35)

The chief priests and scribes (Mt. 27:41)

The soldiers (Lk. 23:36)

The thieves (Mt. 27:44)

2. The sarcasm (what they said)

"And they that passed by railed on him, wagging their heads, and saying, Ah, thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, Save thyself, and come down from the cross." (Mk. 15:29-30)

To wag or shake one's head was a familiar gesture of derision.

God had once warned through Jeremiah that he would cause the pagan Babylonians and other heathen nations to look upon the city of Jerusalem because of the sin of its people.

"To make their land desolate, and a perpetual hissing; every one that passeth thereby shall be astonished, and wag his head" (Jer. 18:16).

The weeping prophet would later with a broken heart testify to the terrible accuracy of this prediction.

"All that pass by clap their hands at thee; they hiss and wag their head at the daughter of Jerusalem, saying, is this the city that men call the perfection of beauty, the joy of the whole earth?" (Lam. 2:15)

David had predicted this Calvary head-wagging on two occasions (see Psa. 22:7; 109:25).

"Likewise also the chief priests mocking said among themselves with the scribes, He saved others;

himself he cannot save. Let Christ the King of Israel descend now from the cross, that we may see and believe. And they that were crucified with him reviled him.” (Mk. 15:31-32)

This crude and cruel statement, *“He saved others; himself he cannot save,”* although uttered with ridicule and hatred, nevertheless voiced a precious and profound truth. Our Lord had already wrestled with this in Gethsemane. The divine decision was made. He could not and would not escape the cup. He must and would indeed die to save others.

“He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God.” (Mk. 27:43)

“And the soldiers also mocked him, coming to him, and offering him vinegar, and saying, If thou be the king of the Jews, save thyself.” (Lk. 23:36-37)

“And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us.” (Lk. 23:39)

- D. The soldiers divide Jesus' clothes into four shares and cast lots for His seamless garment (Jn. 19:23-24). This garment, doubtless stained with sweat and blood will someday be replaced by a glorious one!

“And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle.” (Rev. 1:13)

Jesus is offered wine mixed with myrrh but refuses it (Mt. 27:34; Mk. 15:23). Here is the first of four cups offered to Christ at Calvary.

1. This was the cup of charity. At the site of execution, by law, the victim was given a bitter drink of wine mixed with myrrh (gall) as a mild narcotic or opiate.
2. The second was the cup of mockery. *“And the soldiers also mocked him, coming to him, and offering him vinegar.” (Lk. 23:36)*
3. The third was the cup of sympathy. *“Now there was set a vessel full of vinegar: and they filled a sponge with vinegar, and put it upon hyssop, and put it to his mouth” (Jn. 19:29).* Jesus had refused the first cup at the beginning of His suffering, but now accepted this one at the end of His agony.
4. The fourth was the cup of iniquity. Our Lord himself had spoken of this while in the Garden of Gethsemane. *“Then said Jesus unto Peter, Put up thy sword into the sheath: the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?” (Jn. 18:11)*

A verse found in one of the Psalms sung by Christ and His disciples in the Upper Room (Mt. 26:30) in reality summarized all four cups: *“I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord.” (Psa. 116:13)*

- E. At noon a strange darkness settled over the area, lasting until His death at 3:00 p.m. (Mt. 27:45; Mk. 15:33; Lk. 23:44). Isaac Watts' great hymn, *At The Cross*, speaks of this:

*“Well might the sun in darkness hide and shut his glories in,
When Christ, the mighty Maker died for man, the creature's sin.”*

Thus, the created sun refused to shine upon the crucifixion of the Creator Son!

Just prior to His death Jesus receives some wine vinegar (Mt. 27:48; Mk. 15:36; Jn. 19:29).

F. At the moment of Jesus' death the centurion (officiating Roman soldier) gives dramatic testimony regarding the person of the Savior.

1. The Roman centurion at Calvary affirmed both the royalty and righteousness of Jesus.

His testimony as recorded by Matthew: *"Truly, this was the Son of God."*

His testimony as recorded by Luke: *"Certainly, this was a righteous man."* (Lk. 23:47).

2. He thus became the final of five individuals who attested to the sinlessness of Jesus during those horrible hours before and at the time of the crucifixion. The first four were:

Pilate (Jn. 19:4)

Pilate's wife (Mt. 27:19)

Judas (Mt. 27:4)

The dying thief (Lk. 23:41)

G. After His death the following supernatural phenomenon occurs:

1. The temple veil is torn from top to bottom (Mt. 27:51a; Mk. 15:38; Lk. 23:45).

This veil divided the holy place from the holy of holies, into which only the High Priest might enter on the Day of Atonement (see Ex. 26:31). Thus, the tearing of that veil, which was a type of Christ's human body introduced something new and thrilling, as explained by the author of Hebrews:

"Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; And having an high priest over the house of God; Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water." (Heb. 10:19-22)

2. The earth shook and the rocks split (Mt. 27:51b).

3. Some well-known individuals were raised from the dead.

"And the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, and came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many." (Mt. 27: 52-53)

There are two theories concerning the exact nature of this resurrection.

These "saints" (probably well-known citizens of Jerusalem) were raised from the dead, as was Lazarus (though he eventually died again).

These saints actually received glorified bodies, never again to die.

Question: Why all these miraculous events at this particular time?

Answer: It would appear through all this, including the three-hour darkness that God the Father was attempting to capture the attention of sinful Israel. If so, His message would be:

"Look, Listen, Hear! Something great and glorious has just happened! Israel's promised Messiah, the Savior of Gentiles, and my beloved Son has just paid the full price for the sins of all men everywhere!"

H. The confused and somewhat fearful crowd disperses.

"And all the people that came together to that sight, beholding the things which were done, smote their breasts, and returned. And all his acquaintance, and the women that followed him from Galilee, stood afar off, beholding these things." (Lk. 23:48-49)

I. At the request of the Jewish leaders, Pilate sends soldiers to Golgotha with orders to kill the three men and remove their bodies (Jn. 19:31).

J. The soldiers execute the two thieves by breaking their legs but discover Jesus already dead. Making sure of this, they pierce His side with a spear (Jn. 19:32-37).

"For these things were done, that the scripture should be fulfilled, A bone of him shall not be broken. And again another scripture saith, They shall look on him whom they pierced." (Jn. 19:36-37)

K. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus request and receive from Pilate the lifeless body of Jesus (Mt. 27:57-58; Mk. 15:42-45; Lk. 23:50-52; Jn. 19:38-39a).

L. Both men quickly prepare His body for burial and placed it in Joseph's new tomb (Mt. 27:59-60; Mk. 15:46-47; Lk. 23:53-54; Jn. 19:39b-56).

M. Mary, Mother of Jesus, Mary Magdalene, and some other women sit near His tomb, viewing it in silent sorrow (Mt. 27:61; Mk. 15:47; Lk. 23:55-56).

These then are the sixteen events. We now consider:

THE SEVEN STATEMENTS

A. ONE: *"Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."* (Lk. 23:34)

1. We note He did not pray, "forgive me," but *"forgive them."*

Our Lord would thus suffer not as a martyr (one who dies for his faith) but rather as a Savior (one who redeems sinners)!

4. This prayer has bothered some, as it seems to be a blanket pardon for all involved in Jesus' crucifixion. Of course, we know this is not the case. Forgiveness can come only through faith (Eph. 2:8-9). It has been pointed out by some that the word "forgive" here

can also mean "to allow," and is actually translated thereby on at least thirteen other occasions in the New Testament. If this should be the case here, Christ then would pray, "Father, allow them to crucify me." Thus the prayer would be a plea to stay the wrath of a righteous Father as He viewed His beloved Son being murdered by sinful and wicked men (see Mt. 3:15; 19:14; Mk. 1:34). However, most Bible students would accept the word "forgive" at face value and interpret His prayer as a request for God not to add this horrible crime of regicide (the killing of one's own king) to the personal accounts of those individuals who killed Him. Peter and Paul would amplify this point in later sermons (Acts 3:14-15, 17).

"But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you; And killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses ... And now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers."

See also 1 Cor. 2:8: *"Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory."*

The sinlessness of our Savior is again proven here, for He did not pray, "Father, forgive me." He needed no forgiveness, for He knew no sin. In summary, the first cross utterance did not mean that men are excusable, but rather forgivable. (Contrast Rom. 2:1 with 1 Tim. 1:13.)

3. His prayer here would later serve as an example for Stephen in the hour of his death:

"Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, And cast him out of the city, and stoned him; and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young mans feet, whose name was Saul. And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep." (Acts 7:57-60)

4. The Greek here employs the imperfect verb indicating continuous action in past time. Thus the statement should read, "Father," Jesus kept on saying, "Forgive them..."

Russell Bradley Jones asks:

Can you reconstruct the picture?

Arriving at the place of the skull, Jesus looked about and prayed, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." As the centurion crushed Him to the ground and tied His arms to the crossbeam, He prayed, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." When the blunt spikes tore through each quivering palm, He prayed, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." When the soldiers parted His garments and gambled for the seamless robe, He prayed, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." How many times that prayer pierced Heaven's blue that day no one knows. It was not an ejaculatory petition shot into Heaven in a moment of mercy. Rather the Surety was storming

the Throne of Grace with a barrage of burning appeal. Jesus kept saying, 'Father, forgive them...'" (*Gold from Golgotha*, Moody Press, 1945, pp. 17, 18)

5. Jones continues:

If the prayer had not been uttered, the clear inference is that immediate doom would have destroyed those who nailed Him to the cross. Like a flash of lightning, the thunderbolts of God's wrath would have cleared the earth of those perpetrators of sin. Then and there Satan and his hosts would have been 'cast into the lake of fire' to suffer forever. The winds of God's wrath would have scorched the earth with the fires of justice. No man would have had a chance at salvation, because no man deserved a chance.

But, thank God, Jesus prayed, "Hold the winds of wrath back until the elect are sealed. There are some among these at the cross who will turn when the significance of their crime dawns upon them. Father, postpone the day of judgment. Give them a chance." And because of that prayer, the gospel has been proclaimed and many an unworthy sinner has been saved. (*Ibid.*, pp. 24, 25)

6. It can be seen through this first statement that Jesus was, among other things, simply putting in practice that which He had once preached:

"Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you." (Mt. 5:43-44)

7. One final question: Did the Father answer this request? An answer may be seen by the testimony of the officiating Roman military commander at the cross some six hours later:

"And when the centurion, which stood over against him, saw that he so cried out, and gave up the ghost, he said, Truly this man was the Son of God. There were also women looking on afar off: among whom was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the less and of Joses, and Salome." (Mk. 15:39-40)

B. TWO: *"Verily, I say unto thee, today shalt thou be with me in paradise."* (Lk. 23:43)

1. At first, both thieves were reviling Jesus, along with the crowd. (Mt. 27:44; Mk. 15:32)

Note especially the language of the unrepentant thief:

"And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us." (Lk. 23:39)

2. Particularly significant are the words, "Come down from the cross." Thus, Satan had once worked through an apostle attempting to prevent Jesus from going to the cross:

"From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day. Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee. But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an

offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men." (Mt. 16:21-23)

He now, working through this thing, attempts to prevent Jesus from dying on the cross!

3. The second statement emphasizes several facts concerning the subject of salvation:

That salvation is offered to anyone, anywhere. Are deathbed conversions valid? They are indeed, for there is one noted here. But we quickly note: There is one deathbed conversion in the Bible, so no dying man will despair. There is only one, so no living man will presume.

D. L. Moody once said: "Did ever the new birth take place in so strange a cradle?"

Observe the contrast here:

In the morning the thief we nailed to a cross. In the evening he was a friend of God.

In the morning he was an enemy of Caesar. In the evening he was a friend of God.

In the morning he was spurned by men. In the evening he was fellowshiping with angels.

In the morning he died as a criminal on earth. In the evening he lived as a citizen of heaven.

That salvation is by grace through faith alone. This conversion refutes:

The doctrine of sacramentalism. He was saved apart from confirmation, sprinkling, Holy Communion, and church membership.

The doctrine of baptismal regeneration.

The doctrine of purgatory.

The doctrine of universalism. Only one thief was saved.

That salvation will be rejected by some in spite of everything God can do. The other thief died, eternally lost. Here we see three men:

One was dying for sin (the Savior).

One was dying from sin (the repentant thief).

One was dying in sin (the lost thief).

All classes of humanity were represented at the cross. There were the indifferent ("*the people stood beholding,*" Lk. 23:35); the religious ("*the rulers derided him,*" Lk. 23:35); the materialistic ("*the soldiers parted his raiment and cast lots,*" Lk. 23:34); and the earnest seeker ("*Lord, remember me,*" Lk. 23:42). The cross is indeed the judgment of this world (see John 12:31).

4. Why, it may be asked, was this thief saved? Russell B. Jones suggests:

For one thing, the thief was willing to be saved, not necessarily from his cross, but from his sin. That must have appealed tremendously to Jesus. So many who come to Him are like the other thief; they want to avoid crosses, but they are not concerned about their sin. Some who come down the aisles of our churches professing to confess His name have gone no further than the first thief; they want to escape any and all discomfort and pain; they are not particularly interested in Him for His own sake. To the advantage of the other bandit, let it be said that he was interested in Kingdom issues and privileges. And whether or not he understood the nature of Christ's Kingdom, he wanted the good will of the King and was willing to yield his allegiance. That pleased Jesus.

Further, this thief was persistent. We have another imperfect verb in the Greek original,

"He kept saying, Jesus, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom." His appeal was not an arrow shot at random. It was a storm. It kept pounding on the ear of the Savior: 'Jesus, remember me . . . Jesus, when Thou comest into Thy kingdom ... Jesus, . . . Jesus, remember me ... Jesus.' Above the din of the mocking and the reviling, these words kept pounding at the heart of the Savior." (Ibid., pp. 35, 36)

5. Finally, it may be concluded that during his time of agony the dying thief observed Jesus in a four-fold light.

He saw Jesus the submissive:

The man in the middle did not lash out against the hostility coming from the foot of the cross or the criticism coming from either side.

He saw Jesus the sinless:

"And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us. But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss." (Lk. 23:39-41)

He saw Jesus the Savior:

"And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me." (Lk. 23:42a)

He saw Jesus the Sovereign:

"When thou comest into thy kingdom." (Lk. 23:42b)

6. But suppose the penitent thief had doubted or delayed? A minister was once faithfully warning the people of the danger of procrastination when a man shouted out from the audience, "What about the thief on the cross?" Quickly the preacher asked, "Which thief?" It is dangerous to delay.

One saved – the Lord makes room

*For contrite souls above;
One lost – let none presume
On His exceeding love.*

—Edith E. Trusted

C. THREE: *"Woman, behold thy son! ... Behold thy mother!"* (Jn. 19:26-27)

1. Regarding Mary:

As this heartbroken mother stood weeping at the cross, the strange words by an old prophet spoken some thirty-three years ago may well have suddenly flashed through her mind:

"And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him. And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And he came by the Spirit into the temple: and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him after the custom of the law, Then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said, Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel. And Joseph and his mother marvelled at those things which were spoken of him. And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary his mother, Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against; (Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed." (Lk. 2:25-35)

Russell Jones' comments are helpful here:

It is always hard for a mother to see her son die. She naturally expects him to lay her head in the grave. Especially is this the case with the firstborn, the son of her strength. Jesus was only thirty-three, and Mary must have reached the age when a mother most of all leans for support on a strong and loving son.

Far worse, however, was the death He was dying – the death of a criminal. Many mothers have had to suffer from the kind of death their children have died, when it has been in great agony or in otherwise distressing circumstances. But what mother's sufferings were ever equal to Mary's? There He hung before her eyes; but she was helpless. His wounds bled, but she dared not stanch them; His mouth was parched, but she could not moisten it. These outstretched arms used to clasp her neck; she used to fondle these pierced hands and feet. Ah! The nails pierced her as well as Him; the thorns round His brow were a circle of flame about her heart; the taunts flung at Him wounded her likewise.

But there was worse still – the sword cut deeper. Had not the angel told her before His birth, 'He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest, and the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of His father David; and He shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of His kingdom there shall be no end'? This

greatness, this throne, this crown, this kingdom – where were they? Once she had believed that she really was what the angel had called her – the most blessed of women – when she saw Him lying in her lap in His beautiful infancy, when the shepherds and Magi came to adore Him, and when Simeon and Anna recognized Him as the Messiah. After that ensued the long period of His obscurity in Nazareth. He was only the village carpenter; but she did not weary, for He was with her in their home; and she was confident that the greatness, the throne, the crown, the kingdom would all come in good time. At last His hour struck; and, casting down His tools and bidding her farewell, He went forth out of the little valley into the great world. It is all coming now, she said. Soon the news arrived of the words of grace and power He was speaking, of the multitudes following Him, of the nation being roused, and of the blind, the lame, the diseased, the bereaved who blessed Him for giving joy back to their lives, and blessed her who had borne Him. It is all coming to pass, she said. But then followed other news – of reaction, of opposition, of persecution. Her heart sank within her. She could not stay where she was. She left Nazareth and went away trembling to see what had happened. And now she stands at the foot of His cross. He is dying; and the greatness, the glory, and the kingdom have never come.

What could it mean? Had the angel been a deceiver, and God's Word a lie, and all the wonders of His childhood a dream? We know the explanation now: Jesus was about to climb a far loftier throne than Mary had ever imagined, and the cross was the only road to it. Before many weeks were over Mary was to understand this too; but meantime it must have been dark as Egypt to her, and her heart must have been sorrowful even unto death. The sword had pierced very deep." (Ibid., pp. 128, 129)

*Beside the cross in tears
The woeful mother stood,
Bent 'neath the weight of years,
And viewed His flowing blood;
Her mind with grief was torn,
Her strength was ebbing fast,
And through her heart forlorn
The sword of anguish passed.*

2. Regarding John:

"And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home" (Jn. 19:27b).

The following assumptions may be made from this statement:

That Joseph had previously died. This is strongly indicated by two passages:

"While he yet talked to the people, behold, his mother and his brethren stood without, desiring to speak with him. Then one said unto him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak with thee." (Mt. 12:46-47)

"And when he was come into his own country, he taught them in their synagogue, insomuch that they were astonished, and said, Whence hath this man this wisdom, and these mighty works? Is not this the carpenter's son? is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas? And his sisters, are they not all with us? Whence then hath this man all these things?" (Mt. 13:54-56)

That Mary was living in Jerusalem

That, for some reason, her unbelieving sons and daughters living in Nazareth were either unable or unwilling to care for her (see Jn. 7:1-5)

D. FOUR: *"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Mt. 27:46)*

This prayer is deeper in its mystery and higher in its meaning than any other single prayer in the Bible. God forsaken by God! Who can understand that? The wisest and most profound believer feels utterly inadequate as he approaches it. It can never be mastered by the mortal mind, even though that mind has experienced new birth. Eternity alone will exegete this.

Elisabeth Clephane has so well phrased it:

*"But none of the ransomed ever knew,
How deep were the waters crossed;
Nor how dark was the night,
That the Lord passed through,
Ere he found his sheep that was lost. "*

Three words in this question deserve careful consideration:

1. "Why"?

There are so many unexplained "whys" raised here:

Why did the Father turn His back upon the Son?

Why did not even the Son know the reason?

Why did innocent blood have to be shed for forgiveness of sin?

The first and third of these questions are partially answered in Heb. 9:22; 1 Pet. 2:24; 3:18; and Isa. 53. But what of the second question? Did not Christ know? According to Phil. 2:5-8, Christ voluntarily abstained from employing some of His divine attributes while upon this earth. Thus:

He abstained from using His omnipresence for a period (Jn. 11:15).

He abstained from using His omnipotence for a period (Jn. 5:19).

He abstained from using His omniscience for a period (Lk. 8:45; Mk. 13:32). (See also Lk. 2:40.)

Why then did the Father forsake His son? The answer is two-fold:

Jesus became our sin bearer!

"All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." (Isa. 53:6)

"For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (2 Cor. 5:21). *"Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed."* (1 Peter 2:24)

God cannot look upon sin without judging it!

"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness." (Rom. 1:18)

2. "Forsaken"?

Jesus had previously been forsaken by His friends (Mk. 14:50-52). He will now be forsaken by His Father. Forsaken is the saddest word in any language. In the Greek, it is made up of three words: to leave meaning to abandon; down, suggesting defeat and helplessness; and in, referring to place or circumstance. "The total meaning of the word is that of forsaking someone in a state of defeat or helplessness in the midst of hostile circumstances" (*Bypaths in the Greek New Testament*, by Kenneth S. Wuest, p. 87).

3. "Me"?

Why Jesus? Why could not the sin bearer be a mighty angel or a godly human? Paul quickly answers this:

"For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." (1 Tim. 2:5)

E. FIVE: "I thirst" (Jn. 19:28).

Thus, He who began His ministry by suffering intense hunger (Mt. 4:2), will now end it by experiencing terrible thirst. And yet, the amazing truth remains:

1. The hungry one was and is the eternal Bread of life.
2. The thirsty one was and is the eternal Water of life.

F. SIX: "It is finished" (Jn. 19:30)

1. The sixth statement of Jesus is actually one word in the original Greek. It is *tetelestai*, meaning: "It was finished, and as a result it is forever done." This phrase was a farmer's word. When into his herd there was born an animal so beautiful and shapely that it seemed absolutely destitute of faults and defects, the farmer gazed upon the creature with proud, delighted eyes. "*Tetelestai!*" he said.

It was also an artist's word. When the painter or the sculptor had put the last finishing touches to the vivid landscape or the marble bust, he would stand back a few feet to admire his masterpiece, and, seeing in it nothing that called for correction or improvement, would murmur fondly, "Tetelestai! Tetelestai!"

2. Our Lord cries out, *"It is finished!"* There are three important places where Scripture employs this word "finish."

It is used in Gen. 2:1, referring to the creation of God's works. It is used here in Jn. 19:30, referring to the salvation of His works (see also Jn. 4:34; 5:36; 17:4). It is used in Rev. 10:7 and 16:17, referring to the completion of His works.

3. With gladness we note that He did not say, *"I am finished,"* for He was just beginning.

*"Lifted up was he to die,
'It is finished,' was his cry;
Now in heaven exalted high;
Hallelujah! What a Savior!"*

As the poet has written:

*"Nothing in my hand I bring,
Simply to thy cross I cling."*

G. SEVEN: *"Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit"* (Lk. 23:46).

1. This marks the final of many occasions where Jesus prays to His Father. He did this:

Upon hearing the report of the returning seventy

"In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes: even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight." (Lk. 10:21)

Prior to raising Lazarus

"Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead was laid. And Jesus lifted up his eyes, and said, Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. And I knew that thou hearest me always: but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me." (Jn. 11:41-42)

After some Greeks sought a meeting with Him

"Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify thy name. Then came there a voice from heaven, saying, I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again." (Jn. 12:27-28)

During His great High Priestly Prayer (Jn. 17:1, 5, 11, 21, 24, 25)

In Gethsemane

"And he went a little farther, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt." (Mt. 26:39)

Immediately after being placed on the cross (Lk. 23:34)

2. It can be seen that not only was His birth and resurrection supernatural events (see Lk. 1:34-35; Rom. 1:4; Eph. 1:19-21), but also that of His death. In other words, Jesus died by the sheer act of His will – He dismissed His spirit!
3. He thus (it has been observed) gave up His life because He willed it, when and where He willed it, and as He willed it.
4. All four Gospel accounts record the death of Christ. But one wonders how such a thing could happen? Was not Christ God incarnate? Indeed He was! How, then, could God have actually died on the cross? To explain this, we must return briefly to the book of Genesis. Here we are told of Adam's creation and of his tragic sin. God had warned him that disobedience would result in death, and so it did. In fact, it brought down upon the head of mankind two kinds of death: physical and spiritual.

Both kinds of death here can be defined by one word: *separation*. That is the biblical and theological meaning of the word *death*. Physical death is *separation*, the parting of the soul from the body. Spiritual death is likewise *separation*, the parting of the unsaved person from God. This is sometimes called the second death (see Rev. 20:6, 14; 21:8).

So then, these two hellish enemies, physical and spiritual death, let loose by Adam, continued to curse and terrorize the human race for over forty centuries. Then, in the fullness of time, God sent His beloved Son to our world. The Father referred to His Son as the last Adam (among other names) in 1 Cor. 15:45. Why this title? Because He had come to undo what the first Adam had previously done; that is, He came to rid mankind of those two evil enemies, physical and spiritual death. This He did, while on the cross, where He died spiritually, being separated from God; and He died physically as He accomplished both tasks.

Spiritual death was immediately given the death blow. Paul later assures us that nothing can now separate the believer from the love of God (Rom. 8:35-39). But what about physical death? Paul answers this question in 1 Cor. 15:51-55:

"Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?"

H. Grand conclusion regarding the seven last statements:

"Who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people's: for this he did once, when he offered up himself." (Heb. 7:27)

Author Ray Stedman writes:

As a priest, Jesus Christ could find no unblemished sacrifice that He could offer except Himself, so He offered Himself as a sacrifice; there was found no other priest worthy of offering such a sacrifice, so Christ became both Priest and Victim" (*What More Can God Say?* p. 115).

This dual arrangement can be seen by listening to His seven final sentences while on the cross. The first three demonstrate His priestly ministry while the final four speak of His sacrificial role.

1. His priestly ministry:

"Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Lk. 23:34).

"Verily, I say unto thee, today shalt thou be with me in paradise" (Lk. 23:43).

"Woman, behold thy son!...Behold thy mother." (Jn. 19:26-27)

2. His sacrificial ministry:

"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Mt. 27:46)

"I thirst" (Jn. 19:28).

"It is finished" (Jn. 19:30).

"Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit" (Lk. 23:46).

SATURDAY

"Now the next day, that followed the day of the preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees came together unto Pilate, Saying, Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, After three days I will rise again. Command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night, and steal him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead, so the last error shall be worse than the first. Pilate said unto them, Ye have a watch: go your way, make it as sure as ye can. So they went, and made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone, and setting a watch." (Mt. 27:62-66)

How tragic to realize that the only group to remember the oft-repeated prophecies of Jesus concerning His resurrection consisted of His enemies and not His friends. They simply forgot (see Lk. 24:5-8; Jn. 20:9).