

“JESUS WAS CRUCIFIED”

John 19:16-42

Executions of criminals are becoming a thing of the past in the United States. However, we are still in the top five of nations that practice capital punishment. Last year 28 prisoners were put to death in the USA. These executions took place in a total of six states. Only seven states have abolished the death penalty, but another 27 have not had a single punishment by death in ten years or more.

The death penalty always takes place in the presence of witnesses, sometimes in public view. Today I want to look at the witnesses to Jesus' crucifixion. Hanging used to be the usual manner for capital punishment in our country. Many hangings took place without benefit of a trial. A person might be apprehended by a posse, and hung on the spot.

In my home town, a shocking crime was committed. A certain man was suspected of being responsible. A hunt was organized to find the man. When he was found, he was taken to the city park and hung there. There are newspaper accounts of the hanging and photos. The photos show that a huge crowd had gathered to watch the hanging.

The Russian writer Fyodor Dostoevsky joined a secret group devoted to revolution and illegal propaganda. April 23, 1849 he and other members of the group were arrested and spent eight months in prison. December 22, 1849 the prisoners were led out onto a public square. A sentence of death by firing squad was pronounced. Three prisoners were led out to be shot first. At the last minute, the guns were lowered and a messenger announced that the tsar had decided to spare their lives. Dostoevsky was sentenced to a prison labor camp and military service.

1.) Then he delivered Him to them to be crucified. So they took Jesus and led Him away. And He, bearing His cross, went out to a place called the Place of a Skull, which is called in Hebrew, Golgotha, where they crucified Him, and two others with Him, one on either side, and Jesus in the center. Now Pilate wrote a title and put it on the cross. And the writing was: JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS. Then many of the Jews read this title, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin. Therefore the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews,' but, 'He said, 'I am the King of the Jews.'"" Pilate answered, "What I have written, I have written." Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took His garments and made four parts, to each soldier a part, and also the tunic. Now the tunic was without seam, woven from the top in one piece. They said therefore among themselves, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be," that the Scripture might be fulfilled which says: "They divided My garments among them, And for My clothing they cast lots." Therefore the soldiers did these things. (John 19:16-24 NKJV)

In this section we see the participation of the Roman soldiers, Pilate, and the Jews including the chief priests of the Jews. At various times in history, the Jews have been harshly persecuted. In Christian lands the excuse for persecution has been that the Jews killed Jesus. The Jews have replied, "It was the Romans who crucified Jesus." That is an ignorant argument. All the persons who took part in crucifying Jesus have been dead for nearly two thousand years. To persecute people who might be descended from them is a travesty of justice. Both Jews and Romans were equally responsible.

The cruel manner in which Jesus was treated as a prisoner is sadly repeated up to the present day. The vast majority of good policemen and good soldiers often have receive the anger of large crowds when one or more undisciplined policemen or soldiers take out their frustration or their prejudices on a prisoner in their custody. The soldiers beat Jesus, spit on Him, mocked Him, and took His clothing for themselves.

The Jews became incensed when they saw that the sign on Jesus' cross identified Him as JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS.

2.) Now there stood by the cross of Jesus His mother, and His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. (John 19:25 NKJV)

After this, Joseph of Arimathea, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly, for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus; and Pilate gave him permission. So he came and took the body of Jesus. And Nicodemus, who at first came to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds. Then they took the body of Jesus, and bound it in strips of linen with the spices, as the custom of the Jews is to bury. Now in the place where He was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid. So there they laid Jesus, because of the Jews' Preparation Day, for the tomb was nearby. (John 19:38-42 NKJV)

In addition to the persons named in the text, John was also there, but he does not include himself. John was the only one of the twelve apostles who remained with Jesus. He followed Jesus to the high priest's home. He followed Jesus as He was led away to be crucified. He was in the group of Jesus' friends who stood by the cross. Peter and the other apostles, except Judas Iscariot, had fled the scene and locked themselves in the upper room for fear of the Jews.

There were two prominent rulers of the Jews who were there at the cross. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus were secret disciples of Jesus. They were the ones who went to Pilate and obtained permission to claim the body of Jesus and bury it. It was Joseph of Arimathea who donated his own tomb to bury Jesus' body.

Each of us who is a believer in Christ has been to the cross and seen Jesus upon the cross bearing our own sins, suffering, and dying for our sake. Each of us has also, on more occasion than one, been afraid to admit that we are a follower of Jesus Christ. Maybe like Peter we have denied our Lord, or maybe like the other disciples we have hidden our beliefs and kept quiet when we should have spoken up or witnessed.

Sometimes, a person, whom we never suspected of being a Christian is the one who speaks up and gives a clear testimony of their faith.

3.) Now there stood by the cross of Jesus His mother, and His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus therefore saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing by, He said to His mother, "Woman, behold your son!" Then He said to the disciple, "Behold your mother!" And from that hour that disciple took her to his own home. After this, Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, "I thirst!" Now a vessel full of sour wine was sitting there; and they filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on hyssop, and put it to His mouth. So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, "It is finished!" And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit. (John 19:25-30 NKJV)

In one town where I pastored, there was a Good Friday service with all the churches in town combined for the service. The theme was always "The Seven Last Words." Seven pastors were assigned one of the seven last words of Jesus on the cross. He had ten minutes to preach on that word. In our text John records three of Jesus' last words, "Woman, behold your son! Behold your mother!", "I thirst.", and "It is finished."

In the first of these, "Woman, behold your son." we are shown the selfless love and concern of Jesus for His mother. When most people are in excruciating pain, they cannot think of anything else. Mary was a widow. As her eldest son, it was Jesus' responsibility to support her. As He was dying upon the cross, Jesus asked His best friend to take her in.

In the second word, "I thirst." the true humanity of Jesus was shown. As God He had no bodily needs such as hunger, thirst, pain, etc. As a man He did. As God He could not suffer and die. He became man so that He could suffer and die for us. Since He lived and suffered as a man, now He understands us when we pray for help.

In the third word, uttered just before He died, "It is finished." Jesus declares that the final act in God's plan for the salvation of mankind had been successfully completed. He had made a full and sufficient sacrifice for the sins of all who believe in Him.