

*“Pilate, having scourged Jesus, delivered Him to them to be crucified... and they crucified Him”.*

What did the body of Jesus of Nazareth actually endure during those hours of torture? The common form used in our Lord's day was the Tau cross, shaped like the Greek letter Tau or like our "T". In this cross the patibulum was placed in a notch at the top of the stipes. There is fairly overwhelming archeological evidence that it was on this type of cross that Jesus was crucified.

The upright post, or stipes, was generally fixed in the ground at the site of execution and the condemned man was forced to carry the patibulum, apparently weighing about 110 pounds, from the prison to the place of execution. Roman historical accounts and experimental work have shown that the nails were driven between the small bones of the wrists. Nails driven through the palms will strip out between the fingers when they support the weight of a human body. The misconception may have come about through a misunderstanding of Jesus' words to Thomas, "observe my hands". Anatomists, both modern and ancient, have always considered the wrists as part of the hand. A titulus, or small sign, stating the victim's crime was usually carried at the front of the procession and later nailed to the cross above the head.

The physical passion of Christ began in Gethsemane. It is interesting that the physician of the group, St. Luke, is the only one to mention sweat as drops of blood. He says, "*And being in agony, He prayed the longer. And his sweat became as drops of blood..*".

Though very rare, the phenomenon of Hematidrosis, or 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 produced marked weakness and possible shock.

After the arrest in the middle of the night, Jesus was brought before the Sanhedrin and Caiaphas, the High Priest; it is here that the first physical trauma was inflicted. A soldier struck Jesus across the face for remaining silent when questioned by Caiaphas. The palace guards then blindfolded Him and mockingly taunted Him to identify each of them as they passed by, spat on Him, and struck Him in the face.

In the morning, Jesus, battered and bruised, dehydrated, and exhausted from a sleepless night, is taken across Jerusalem to the Praetorium of the Fortress Antonia, the seat of government of the Procurator of Judea, Pontius Pilate. Pilate's attempted to pass responsibility to Herod Antipas, the Tetrarch of Judea. Jesus apparently suffered no physical mistreatment at the hands of Herod and was returned to Pilate.

It was then, in response to the cries of the mob, that Pilate ordered Barabbas released and condemned Jesus to scourging and crucifixion.

Preparations for the scourging are carried out. The prisoner is stripped of His clothing and His hands tied to a post above His head. It is doubtful whether the Romans made any attempt to follow the Jewish law in this matter of scourging. The Jews had an ancient law prohibiting more than forty lashes. The Pharisees, always making sure that the law was strictly kept, insisted that only thirty\_nine lashes be given.

The Roman legionnaire steps forward with a short whip consisting of several heavy, leather thongs with two small balls of lead attached near the ends of each. The heavy whip is brought down with full force again and again across Jesus' shoulders, back, and legs. At first the heavy thongs cut through the skin only. Then as blows continue, they cut deeper into the tissues, producing first an oozing of blood from the capillaries and veins of the skin, and finally spurting arterial bleeding from vessels in the underlying muscles. The small balls of lead first produce large, deep bruises which are broken open by subsequent blows.

Finally the skin of the back is hanging in long ribbons and the entire area is an unrecognizable mass of torn, bleeding tissue. When it is determined by the centurion in charge that the prisoner is near death, the beating is finally stopped. The half\_fainting Jesus is then untied and allowed to slump to the stone pavement, wet with His own blood. The Roman soldiers see a great joke in this provincial Jew claiming to be a king. They throw a robe across His shoulders and place a stick in His hand for a scepter. A bundle of flexible branches covered with long thorns (commonly used for firewood) are plaited into a shape of a crown and this is pressed into His scalp. Again there is more bleeding.

After mocking Him and striking Him across the face, the soldiers take the stick from His hand and strike Him across the head, driving the thorns deeper into His scalp and finally, the robe is 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, causes excruciating pain... almost as though He were again being whipped \_ and the wounds begin to bleed again.

In deference to Jewish custom, the Romans return His garments. The heavy patibulum of the cross is tied across His shoulders, and the procession of the condemned Christ, two thieves, and the execution detail of Roman soldiers headed by a centurion, begins its slow journey.

In spite of His efforts to walk erect, the weight of the heavy wooden beam, together with the shock produced by blood loss, causes Jesus to stumble and fall. The wood of

the beam gouges into the lacerated skin and muscles of the shoulders. The centurian, anxious to get on with the crucifixion, selects a stalwart North African man, Simon of Cyrene, to carry the cross. Jesus follows, still bleeding and sweating and in shock. The 650 yard journey to Golgotha is finally complete. The prisoner is again stripped of His clothes \_ except for a loin cloth which is allowed the Jews.

Jesus is offered wine mixed with Myrrh, a mild analgesic mixture. He refuses. Jesus is quickly placed backward with His shoulders against the wood. The legionnaire feels for the depression at the front of the wrist. He 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 in place at the top of the stipes and the titulus reading "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews" is nailed in place. The left foot is pressed backward against the right foot, and with both feet extended and 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 \_ fiery pain shoots along the fingers and up the arms to explode in the rain as 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 tearing through the nerves between the metatarsal bones of the feet.

At this point, another phenomenon occurs. As the arms fatigue, waves of cramps sweep over the muscles, knotting them in deep, throbbing pain. With these cramps comes the inability to push upward. Hanging by His arms, the pectoral muscles are paralyzed and the intercostal muscles are unable to act. Air can be drawn into the lungs, but cannot be exhaled.

Jesus fights to raise Himself in order to get even one short breath. 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. It was undoubtedly during these periods that He uttered the seven short sentences which are recorded:

1<sup>st</sup> toward soldiers gambling for His garment, "*Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.*"

2<sup>nd</sup> to the persistent thief, "*Today thou shalt be with me in Paradise.*"

3<sup>rd</sup> looking down at John he said, "*Behold thy mother*" - "*Woman, behold thy son.*"

The 4<sup>th</sup> is from the beginning of the 22nd Psalm, "*My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*"

Hours of this limitless pain, cycles of twisting, cramps, intermittent partial asphyxiation, searing pain as the tissue is torn from His lacerated back as He moves up and down against the rough timber. Then another agony begins. A deep crushing pain deep in the chest as the pericardium slowly fills with serum and begins to compress the heart.

Psalm 22:14: "*I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels.*"

It is now almost over \_ the loss of tissue fluids has reached a critical level, the compressed heart is struggling to pump heavy, thick, sluggish blood into the tissues, 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.

Jesus gasps His 5<sup>th</sup>, "*I thirst.*" Psalm 22: "*My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death.*"

A sponge soaked in Posca, the cheap, sour wine which is the staple drink of the Roman legionnaires, is lifted to His lips. He apparently does not take any of the liquid. The body of Jesus is now in extremis, and He can feel the chill of death creeping through His tissues. This realization brings out

6<sup>th</sup> words, "*It is finished.*"

His mission of atonement has been completed. Finally He can allow His body to die. With one last surge of strength, He once again presses His torn feet against the nail, straightens His legs, takes a deeper breath, and utters His 7<sup>th</sup> and last cry: "*Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit.*"

The common method of ending a crucifixion was the breaking 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 then occurred. The legs of the two thieves were broken, but when they came to Jesus, they saw that this was unnecessary. Apparently to make doubly sure of death, the legionnaire drove his lance between the ribs, upward through the pericardium and into the heart.

John 19:34: "*And immediately there came out blood and water.*" Thus there was an escape of watery fluid from the sacrifice surrounding the heart and blood from the interior of heart. We therefore, have rather conclusive postmortem evidence that our

Lord died, not the usual crucifixion death by suffocation, but of heart failure due to shock and a constriction of the heart by fluid in the pericardium.

Thus we have seen a glimpse of the epitomy of evil which man can exhibit toward man \_ and toward God. This is not a pretty sight and is apt to leave us despondent and depressed. How grateful we can be that we have a sequel, a glimpse of the infinite mercy of God toward man \_ the miracle of the atonement and the expectation of Easter morning! *Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.* (Isaiah 53:4)