

The Crucifixion of Christ

He's waiting for you with open arms at the Cross.

First the upright wood was planted in the ground. It was not high, and probably the feet of the sufferer were not above one or two feet from the ground. Thus could the communication described in the Gospels take place between him and others; thus also might his sacred lips be moistened with the sponge attached to a short stalk of hyssop. Next the transverse wood (antenna) was placed on the ground and the sufferer laid upon it, when his arms were extended, drawn up and bound to it. Then (this not in Egypt, but in Carthage and in Rome) a strong sharp nail was driven first into the right, then into the left hand (the clavi trabales).

Next the sufferer was drawn up by means of ropes, perhaps ladders; the transverse either bound or nailed to the upright and a rest or support for the body (the cornu or sedile) fastened on it. Lastly, the feet were extended and either one nail hammered into each or a larger piece of iron through the two. And so might the crucified hang for hours, even days, in the unutterable anguish of suffering till consciousness at last failed.

—Alfred Edersheim

In the cross of Christ God says to man, "That is where you ought to be. Jesus my Son hangs there in your stead. His tragedy is the tragedy of your life. You are the rebel who should be hanged on the gallows. But lo, I suffer instead of you and because of you, because I love you in spite of what you are. My love for you is so great that I meet you there, there on the cross. I cannot meet you anywhere else. You must meet me there by identifying yourself with the one on the cross. It is by this identification that I, God can meet you in him, saying to you as I say to him, My beloved Son."

—Emil Brunner

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. Isaiah 53:3–6 KJV

Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives, and his disciples followed him. On reaching the place, he said to them, "Pray that you will not fall into temptation." He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done." An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground. Luke 22:39–44 NIV

Fully God and fully man, Christ in His humanity was in anguish, knowing in detail all the horrors to come. But knowing is not experiencing. Crucifixion is typically a slow and painful death, meant to make a statement, often taking days to its end. Asphyxiation is the final cause of death as the lungs are unable to take in enough air when the arms are suspended out on the cross. Add to that anguish being pierced through the feet and wrists, causing continual shooting pain, hunger and thirst, and scorching sun.

Remember too that before all this, Jesus was severely flogged to near death with whips tipped with metal barbs. But the crowds wanted Him crucified still. Crown of thorns mashed into His head, torn flesh from head to toe, forced to carry the heavy wooden crosspiece upon a bloody beaten back, Jesus experienced in full the agony of the Cross. Just to make sure He was dead, a spear was thrust into His side, piercing near His heart, oozing out water and blood.

The legs of the criminals crucified next to Him were broken to speed up the death process. Unable to push up and gasp for breath, dying comes quickly. Jesus knew all this and prayed all the more earnestly in the garden, sweating drops of blood just a precursor of what was to come. He accepted His lot for which He came and drank fully of this cup, all done because of His love for you and me.

It is at the Cross of Christ that you will find forgiveness for every sin. It is at the Cross of Christ that you will find everlasting life with Him. At the Cross, you will find healing for every ailment, hope for your tomorrow, and wholeness replacing what's been lost. With your sin, He took your guilt and shame, your sorrow and pain, your despondency and despair, and your weariness and turmoil. He offers His peace and joy, His assurances and promises, an abundant life, and new strength for each day. Meet Christ at the Cross—He says, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:28, 30 NIV).