

Though He Was Crucified

Crucified!

No death is so thorough. No shame is so complete.

First, there was the scourging.

The scourging post was two feet high. An iron ring, placed close to the top, projected from both sides.

Clothing was ripped away from a prisoner so that he stood naked. Roman lictors were professionals. They confined their labours to the fine, brutal art of scourging, and they could beat a victim until only the barest spark of life remained in the prisoner.

Wrists were firmly shackled to the iron rings. Then the victim was stretched, face down, with his feet pointing away from the post.

The Roman scourge was a flagra, a short-handled whip consisting of several thin iron chains which ended in small weights.

Scourging was called the "little death". It preceded the "big death": Crucifixion.

Even the tension of awaiting the first blow is cruel. The body is rigid. The muscles knot in tormenting cramps. Colour drains from the cheeks. Lips are drawn tight against the teeth.

As the whip descends, the chains fan out across the back, and each link cuts through the skin and deep into the flesh. The weights crash with bruising force into the ribs and curl tortuously around the chest.

When a man is scourged there is pain beyond the memory of pain. Sweat bursts from the brow and stings the eyes. At each stroke of the flagra, a victim's body twitches like a beheaded chicken. The second stroke patterns the back and half of the chest with a V-shaped network of small cuts. Only the Son of God could hold back the high-pitched wail of unbearable agony.

The very juice of life is torn away with every lash. There is only the blinding, burning pain as cruel whips whistle again and again through the air and across the back and shoulders. The flagra can flay a man alive.

Under Hebrew law, the strokes were limited to 39. Roman punishment was not so limited. There was only one rule for the lictor who scourged a man about to be crucified: he must not die. A spark of life must be sustained for the agony on the cross.

Men have bitten their tongues in two under such beatings.

Only blessed unconsciousness could bring relief.

The limp body of a victim was cut away from the post. His wounds were washed but not otherwise medicated. The next step was the parade to the execution ground.

Roman politicians always liked to make examples of condemned men. The long, slow parade along public streets was designed to serve as a warning to others that Rome dealt quickly and mercilessly.

A centurion usually served as the executioner or *carnifex servorum*.

While four soldiers held the prisoner, he placed the sharp five-inch iron spike in the centre of the palm of the hand. A skilful, experienced blow would send it through to the wood. Four to five more strokes would hammer the spike deep into the rough plank, and a final blow turned it up so that the hand could not slip free.

A small projection, resembling a rhinoceros horn and known as the "sedile" is fitted solidly through the crotch. This was fitted in order to take most of the weight off the condemned man's hands. Then a nail was driven through each foot.

It was a death reserved for slaves, thieves and traitors.

The wounds in the hands send fire down through the arms.

Fainting only relieves temporarily.

It is darkness and pain; then pain and darkness.

The pain in the back, arms, hands, feet and crotch is a dull, throbbing, horrible, endless pain. The pain builds up. It multiplies. It is cumulative. There is not one moment of respite.

The cross is planted so that the greatest amount of sunlight will pierce the prisoner's eyes.

Below, the curious crowd wait, fascinated by the torture. The macabre scene is played out slowly. Dying should be a private thing, not a public spectacle. There is something obscene about having a mob of people standing around, waiting for you to die.

Then the thirst begins.

The lips are dry. The mouth is parched. The blood is hot. The skin is fevered. The greatest of all needs at this moment is a drop of cool water.

Water is denied.

At the foot of the cross the death-squad drinks in the presence of the dying man, to add to his mental torment. The sun shines directly into the eyes of the crucified. Even when the eyelids are closed a red glare penetrates. The tongue thickens. What was once saliva is now like unloomed wool. Swelling begins in the hands and the feet. The sedile digs deeply into the genitals. It is impossible to turn, or to change one's position. Muscles begin to twitch.

The real horror is only beginning.

What has happened up until now is child's play.

One by one the muscles of the back gather in tight, knotty cramps. There is no escaping them, no pulling out of them, no gentle massaging hands to ease them away. They move across the shoulders and the thorax. They move down into the abdomen.

After two hours on a cross, every muscle in the body is locked in solid knots and the agony is beyond endurance. Men shriek themselves into insanity.

The pain and symptoms are identical to tetanus (lockjaw or the state of a muscle when undergoing continued contraction).

Man, with all his genius, has never devised a more cruel or more agonising death than that of tetanus - the slow, steady contraction of every muscle. Death by crucifixion makes the agony last as long as possible.

Each hour is an eternity.

At times the cramps make the neck rigid and the head is held flush against the vertical beam. A man longs for death. It is his only desire.

There are flies, insects, and the yelps of dogs with the smell of blood in their nostrils. Birds of prey, scavengers of the skies, circle lower and lower.

Prayers seem to mock a man, but you either pray or curse.

As the hours pass, the tiny blood vessels which feed the nerves will be squeezed flat, and with the lack of blood circulation comes a numbing paralysis.

A new agony develops for those who linger on the cross. It is the agony of the mucous membrane.

On the cross there is no end of suffering. It is only the manner of suffering that changes, and the degree of pain that changes.

As the hours passed, soldiers were inclined to hasten death. They began breaking bones. Standing on a ladder, a practised legionnaire would swing a mallet in a short arc and shatter the right femur (the thigh-bone) instantly. A second, sharp blow would shatter the left thigh.

These were new pains.

During crucifixion, the mucous membrane - that thin, slippery tissue which lines and lubricates much of the human body - dries to the consistency of fine gravel and scrapes the tender tissues of the anus (the posterior opening of the alimentary canal). The dried membranes tear at the tortured throat. They lie like stones in the sinuses. Layers of tissue are ripped from the eyes every time they are moved or blinked.

Could there ever be more intense suffering this side of hell?

Most condemned men died naked.

CHRIST WAS CRUCIFIED. He died the most brutal death ever devised by man.

He took my place.

It was my sin that sent Him there.

Jesus Christ died the most thorough death ever devised. It was designed to allow the slow death-erosion of cell, muscle, emotion, bone, tissue, mind, spirit, blood and heart-beat. Thus the victory of the Resurrection is the most complete victory ever recorded.

**Up from the grave He arose,
With a mighty triumph o'er His foes;
He arose a Victor from the dark domain,
And He lives forever with His saints to reign.
He arose! He arose!
Hallelujah! Christ arose!**

No further sacrifice for my sins is needed.

Jesus paid it ALL.

1. CORINTHIANS 1:17-24

by C. M. Ward (Sydney)

CHRISTIAN ASSEMBLIES INTERNATIONAL, P.O. BOX 888, COFFS HARBOUR NSW 2450, AUSTRALIA