

Galatians 6:14 “*God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ*”

Human execution is never a pretty thing. How gruesome would it be to watch the hooded form drop through the scaffold, to view a hurling body, to hear the snap of the rope and see the struggling body grew limp. It would be horrible to see a victim of the electric chair stiffen, and burn beneath the tremendous voltage. Those who have watched the gas chambers – and witnessed the gasping for air, the tightening of the neck, the bulging of the eyes, have come away with sickening memories..

There is no hanging, no gas chamber as terrible as Crucifixion. The cross is not just a trinket to be worn around one’s neck, an ornament on a church steeple or an emblem stamped on the Bible in cold ink. The cross was a dreadful, horrendous method of execution.

I warn you now; Christ’s crucifixion was not a pretty thing!

Jesus was born beneath the shadow of the cross. He came into the world to die on the cross. Every step He took in this life brought Him nearer and nearer to the cross. Every sermon He preached, every miracle He wrought had to do with the message of the cross.

As Jesus staggered up Golgotha, His body pressed to the ground beneath the weight of the cross. It was a day of dark gloom when the sound of the hammer-on-nail rang out and Christ’s body was lifted up on the cross. Jesus said, “*For this cause came I into the world, to give My life a ransom for many*” (John 12:27 with Matthew 20:28).

No, crucifixion was not a pretty sight. All the horror of human history came into focus on the cross Jesus bore.

Matthew 27:26 states, “*They scourged Jesus and delivered Him up to be crucified.*” It had been predicted in the Old Testament. Psalm 129:3, speaking of this time, prophesied, “*The powers did plow upon my back. They made long their furrows. They did gather together against me and did tear my flesh.*” And Isaiah 50:6, viewing scourging, predicted, “*I gave my back to the smitters.*”

The Roman scouring was called “*The halfway death,*” because it stopped just this side of death. Scouring was administered by trained men. The instrument they used was strips of leather with chunks of sharp glass, or iron, attached to a short circular club. This was brought all the way back and whistled forward, making a dull drum like sound as it smashed against the back of the victim. The bits of glass and iron would curl around the body, cutting deep, sometimes to the bone.

The “cat-of-nine-tails” as it was called, was brought back again, and aimed at the sufferer and come crushing against their back. The scream of the lash split the air as strip

after strip was laid on the quivering back. Then the lashing moves in slow, heavy rhythm as lash after lash was administered.

Many victims collapsed into unconsciousness, their flesh lacerated as, actually, pieces of flesh dropped from their back.

There was a tribune whose only responsibility was to stop the beating when the victim was as close to death as possible, and still be revived. He bends over the tortured bruised body and orders the executioner to stop.

The victim is untied, falls from the post, and rolls on His back. He is throbbing with pain that began with a dull pulsing thing and mounted until his entire body screams with agony.

It was the custom to permit the soldiers to enjoy their “*playful*” time with the victim. The only limitation was that they not kill the culprit.

Matthew 27:27-30 states, “*Then [after the scourging] the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the common hall, and gathered unto him the whole band of soldiers [a cohort of about 600]. And they stripped Him, and put on Him a scarlet robe. And when they had platted a crown of thorns, they put it upon His head, and a reed in His right hand: and they bowed the knee before Him, and mocked Him, saying, Hail, King of the Jews! And they spit upon Him, and took the reed, and smote Him on the head.*”

The soldiers drop a “*scarlet*” woolen cloak over Jesus’ naked, bleeding back. These “*playful*” soldiers would pay mock homage to one who called Himself the King of the Jews, so they walked up close and bowed before Him and spat upon Him – the whole band of soldiers! The spittle hangs on His bread and clings to His garment.

Ever see a bramble bush from which this “*crown of thorns*” was made? It has cruel, stubborn, dead-hard thorns. The bush grows around Jerusalem and its branches would be stacked in piles for firewood. A mock crown was made and held over Jesus’ head, then gouged down into His temples. Blood coursed down His cheeks and mingled with the spittle.

Jesus stands gory with crimson blood. Isaiah prophesied of this moment and said, “*There is no beauty that we should desire Him*” (Isaiah 53:2).

The soldiers snatch a heavy reed (something comparable to a boat ore) out of His hands, which they had placed there as a mock scepter, and struck His head with it – all 600 soldiers!

The puny hands of men smite the Son of God; they beat Him on His head with the “*reed*” they hand placed there. A “*scarlet cloak*,” made of thick woolen fabric, placed on His bleeding back, and a crown of heavy sharp thorns. They would make a comic king of Him.

Mark 15:19 says, *“They smote Him on the head with a reed, and did spit upon Him, and bowing their knees worshipped Him.”*

See Him? His hair, under the crown, is damp discolored with crimson blood. His face so marred, that his individual features are indistinguishable. Isaiah, certainly, was right, *“There is no beauty to behold here!”*

Isaiah’s prophecy does not mean that Jesus was not handsome. What he was prophesying that Jesus’ features would be marred more than any other man. Isaiah prophesied concerning Jesus’ terrible ordeal of Calvary.

Continuing in Matthew 27, verse 31 says, *“After that they had mocked Him, they took the robe off from him, and put His own raiment on Him, and led Him away to crucify Him.”* John 19:17 says, *“And He bearing His cross went forth into a place called the place of a skull, which is called in the Hebrew Golgotha.”*

Jesus, weak and exhausted by the beating and mocking, is compelled to carry His cross. He has trouble holding Himself erect, must less carry the heavy timbers of the cross. He staggers on under the burden, lurching to take each step. Finally, He has reached His limitation of physical endurance. Weary and exhausted under the weight of the cross, He stumbles and falls. A harden, sadistic, soldier jerks the rope and order, *“Get up!”* Jesus tries to move, but the burden is too heavy. Jesus falls onto the gravel of the Via Dolorosa. He pitches forward, but the cross, with its rough-hewn timbers, is too much for Him to bear.

The soldiers see the rivets of blood and realize that He is at the place of total exhaustion and it would be useless to order Him to carry the cross any further. One of the soldiers put his foot on Him, with contempt, and shakes Him like a dead dog.

Matthew 27:23 says, *“They found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name, and him they compelled to bear the cross.”*

Jesus, with great difficulty, continues to drag Himself along the dusty road to Calvary.

They come to the top of a mournful hill and stand on the summit. Matthew 27:33 simply states, *“When they were come unto a place called Golgotha, that is to say, a place of a skull, they crucified Him.”*

There is no mistake about it; this is a place of execution. Crosses stand naked against the sky.

The Phoenicians were the first to devise crucifixion. They had tried every imaginable cruelty they could think of: death by spear – boiling in oil – impalement – stoning – strangulation – drowning – and burning at the stake. But it all was too quick.

They wanted a means of punishment that was slow, painful and placed the criminal before the gaze of people – so they devised the cross!

Crucifixion was done efficiently. The victim was brought down to the ground and laid upon the cross. The executioners wore aprons with pockets that held five-inch spikes. He would take one; hold a couple in his teeth, while he hammered a spike in the sufferer's hand. He would kneel on the victim's arm, raise the hammer in the air and bring it down with force. The air would echo with the sticking of the hammer on nail as the soldier struck again and again. He drives the spike in, severing tendons, tissues, and muscles and rips as the spike tears the flesh.

Were they the hands of a criminal, a malefactor, a murderer, and insurrectionists? No! They were in innocent hands that reached to a coffin and raised the dead; hands that opened blind eyes; hands that reached out to a needy world. Now they are scarred with nail prints.

With Jesus in agony of pain, the soldiers lift the cross and let it drop into the hole that had been dug for it.

The things that made crucifixion such a painful death, was the position of the body of the victim. When the body sagged in fatigue, the weight of the body was hanging on the spikes in the hands. When the pain in the palms and wrists became unbearable, the muscles in the arm cramped, the muscles on the sides of the chest were momentarily paralyzed. The victim would draw air into his lungs, but became powerless to exhale. The sufferer would push his weight on the insteps of his bleeding feet, until his shoulders were level with his hands. He could, at least, breathe, as he fought the pain in his feet and the cramps in his legs. The crucified would push up and struggle violently for a few breaths of air and, when he could stand the pain no longer, would sag, slowly asphyxiate himself.

His nerves were pulled tight like the strings on a violin. Every moment was sixty slow agonizing, steps. Every second the pain mounted until the body screams with agony.

Jesus died as a man, with the same physical limitations of any human being.

The cross is not a beautiful thing. It is splintered with spikes and smeared with human blood. The cross is an emblem of the most excruciating torment ever dealt by man. It was a merciless, cruel, flaming hell.

After the soldiers had crucified Him, Matthew 27:36 tells us, "*sitting down they watched Him.*"

We must tread softly as the Prince of glory dies. See His aching fingers clenched over cold spikes and torn flesh. His face is drawn and white. His features twist and distort. His eyes are sunken, as though grief has pushed them back in their sockets, His eyelids quiver. His body drops and shivers in the last chill of death. Crimson oozing from

under the jagged gashes in his head and body. His once magnificent body becomes a raging infernal of pain. He lifts His bruised, and battered body with one last plea and cries "*I thirst.*" He begs for water!

O, skies have you not one cloud to send, one shower to dispatch to that hill were morns the giver of everlasting water? O fountain of Hermon, or streams of Lebanon, can you not bare one single drop from your entire vast reservoir to cool the parched tongues and fevered lips of your God? What a solemn tragedy that His cry should have to be hushed by dry, cracked lips of death.

No wonder that Isaiah felt the inadequacy of human vocabulary when he spanned seven hundred years with prophetic vision and published his morbid findings – "*His features were marred more than any man, His form more than the sons of men, and there is no beauty that we should desire Him*" (Isaiah 53).

Tongue can never tell – the throat can never sin – the hand can never paint – the tragedy that was enacted upon that hill that day.

If you could gather the wail of the icy-winds that howl through the frozen north; extract from the heart of a mother, watching wild beasts tear at the throat of her baby; capture the hopeless groans and helpless shrieks from the land of the damned – you would be unable to paint Calvary adequately!

Another observation: The sun looked down through the ages on countless tragedies; wars raged beneath it – bodies have lain in pools of blood as it continued to shine – acts of pollution and filth were committed as it watch – but it kept right on looking! Murder, rape, pillage never caused the sun to neither frown nor blush. Oh, the lewdness and lawlessness that has been committed, yet the sun gazed on it all ever since it was placed in the sky. The sun kept on gazing as though everything was in order. But on this day, the sun beheld this sight and drew a curtain of darkness that drenched the earth in the black of night.

I cannot tell you how much Jesus Christ suffered. He felt the combined pain of hell's awful infinity surging through Him that day – Why" – why? – Why?

The reason: *He did for our sins!* He died for **your** sins!

Won't you accept Him as your Savior? He was paying the penalty for your sins. But, as any gift given, this salvation must be received.

*"As many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name"* (John 1:12).