

The Great Sayings in the Gospels
162 - The Crucifixion and Death of Jesus Christ

Luke 23:32-46

- 32 And there were also two other, malefactors, led with him to be put to death.
- 33 And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left.
- 34 Then said Jesus, **Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.** And they parted his raiment, and cast lots.
- 35 And the people stood beholding. And the rulers also with them derided him, saying, He saved others; let him save himself, if he be Christ, the chosen of God.
- 36 And the soldiers also mocked him, coming to him, and offering him vinegar,
- 37 And saying, If thou be the king of the Jews, save thyself.
- 38 And a superscription also was written over him in letters of Greek, and Latin, and Hebrew, **THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.**
- 39 And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us.
- 40 But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation?
- 41 And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss.
- 42 And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.
- 43 And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, **To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.**

John 19:25-27

- 25 Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene.
- 26 When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, **Woman, behold thy son!**
- 27 Then saith he to the disciple, **Behold thy mother!** And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home.

Matt 27:46-47

- 46 And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?
- 47 Some of them that stood there, when they heard that, said, This man calleth for Elias.

John 19:28-30

- 28 After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, saith, **I thirst.**
- 29 Now there was set a vessel full of vinegar: and they filled a sponge with vinegar, and put it upon hyssop, and put it to his mouth.
- 30 When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, **It is finished:** and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost. KJV

Luke 23

44 And it was about the sixth hour, and there was a darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour.

45 And the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was rent in the midst.

46 And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, **Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit:** and having said thus, he gave up the ghost. KJV

Introduction:

We think that Jesus spent about six hours on the cross, from 9 A.M. to 3 P.M. During those hours the Greatest Transaction that ever occurred took place. The sins of all those who would ever be saved had been loaded on to the body and mind of the Son of God and He hung there, enduring the wrath of the Almighty, His Own Wrath, upon those sins. He had the very real sense that He had been abandoned by the Father and the Holy Spirit which no doubt caused as great a pain as the sense of the corruption itself.

We have often mentioned that during those hours the impossible took place. The penalty for the sins of all who had ever or would ever trust Him was paid in totality. The Mercy and Love of God satisfied His Own Absolutely Perfect Justice so that nothing further would ever be required in order for them to be considered Justified, Perfectly Holy, in His Eyes.

The Magnitude of the Suffering was intense beyond the capacity of any creature to ever fathom. How could God abandon God? How could the Perfectly Holy One become guilty before His Own Bar of Justice? How could a human frame bear up under such agony? And how could a human mind experience this level of suffering and not completely break? Would not the forces which tore back and forth through Him in those hours simply shred a mortal body?

Yet, He sustained Himself, bore the wrath due to us, and secured for us perfect, complete and everlasting pardon for all of the vile things that we have done. And then, beyond amazing, He actually acted in this world toward those whose sins He was bearing in a gracious, caring and loving way. The things that He said while He hung there, for the most part, were direct in mercy toward sinners, some of them hard-hearted and cruel.

A number of things have been written attempting to define and describe the sufferings of Jesus on that awful day and what follows is something that I found which, I believe, was originally published in the Journal of the American Medical Association, JAMA.

“The rigors of Jesus’ ministry (that is, traveling by foot throughout Palestine) would have precluded any major physical illness or a weak general constitution. Accordingly, it is reasonable to assume that Jesus was in good physical condition before his walk to Gethsemane. However, during the 12 hours between 9 PM Thursday and 9 AM Friday, he had suffered great emotional stress (as evidenced by hematomas - *the spontaneous bleeding from His pores in the Garden*), abandonment by his closest friends (the disciples), and a physical beating (after the first Jewish trial). Also, in the setting of a traumatic and sleepless night, he had been forced to walk more than 2.5 miles (4.0 km) to and from the sites of the various trials (Fig 1). These physical and

emotional factors may have rendered Jesus particularly vulnerable to the adverse hemodynamic effects of the scourging.”

I have read some historians who have said that the Romans rarely flogged *and* crucified but others say this, “Flogging was a legal preliminary to every Roman execution, and only women and Roman senators or soldiers (except in cases of desertion) were exempt. The usual instrument was a short whip (flagellum) with several single or braided leather thongs of variable lengths, in which small iron balls or sharp pieces of sheep bones were tied at intervals. Occasionally, staves also were used. For scourging, the man was stripped of his clothing, and his hands were tied to an upright post. The back, *buttocks*, and legs were flogged either by two soldiers (lictors) or by one who alternated positions. The severity of the scourging depended on the disposition of the lictors and was intended to weaken the victim to a state just short of collapse or death. After the scourging, the soldiers often taunted their victim.”

“As the Roman soldiers repeatedly struck the victim’s back with full force, the iron balls would cause deep contusions, and the leather thongs and sheep bones would cut into the skin and subcutaneous tissues. Then, as the flogging continued, the lacerations would tear into the underlying skeletal muscles and produce quivering ribbons of bleeding flesh. Pain and blood loss generally set the stage for circulatory shock. The extent of blood loss may well have determined how long the victim would survive on the cross.”

“At the Praetorium, Jesus was severely whipped. (Although the severity of the scourging is not discussed in the four gospel accounts, it is implied in one of the epistles [1 Peter 2:24]. A detailed word study of the ancient Greek text for this verse indicates that the scourging of Jesus was particularly harsh.) It is not known whether the number of lashes was limited to 39, in accordance with Jewish law. The Roman soldiers, amused that this weakened man had claimed to be a king, began to mock him by placing a robe on his shoulders, a crown of thorns on his head, and a wooden staff as a scepter in his right hand. Next, they spat on Jesus and struck him on the head with the wooden staff. Moreover, when the soldiers tore the robe from Jesus’ back, they probably reopened the scourging wounds.

“The severe scourging, with its intense pain and appreciable blood loss, most probably left Jesus in a pre-shock state. Moreover, hematidrosis had rendered his skin particularly tender. The physical and mental abuse meted out by the Jews and the Romans, as well as the lack of food, water, and sleep, also contributed to his generally weakened state. Therefore, even before the actual crucifixion, Jesus’ physical condition was at least serious and possibly critical.”

“Crucifixion probably first began among the Persians. Alexander the Great introduced the practice to Egypt and Carthage, and the Romans appear to have learned of it from the Carthaginians. Although the Romans did not invent crucifixion they perfected it as a form of torture and capital punishment that was designed to produce a slow death with maximum pain and suffering. It was one of the most disgraceful and cruel methods of execution and usually was reserved only for slaves, foreigners, revolutionaries, and the vilest of criminals. Roman law usually protected Roman citizens from crucifixion, except perhaps in the case of desertion by soldiers.

“In its earliest form in Persia, the victim was either tied to a tree or was tied to or impaled on an upright post, usually to keep the guilty victim’s feet from touching holy ground. Only later was a true cross used; it was characterized by an upright post (stipes) and a horizontal crossbar (patibulum), and it had several variations.”

“It was customary for the condemned man to carry his own cross from the flogging post to the site of crucifixion outside the city walls. He was usually naked, unless this was prohibited by local customs.”

Concerning The Cross

There are varying understandings of what the cross looked like and how it was configured. The Romans used several configurations in addition to the one that we normally think of and even the design that we typically think of has the ‘cross’ had variations. One of the variations was the single piece thing that we are familiar with and another had it as a two-piece affair in which the upright stayed permanently in the air and only the cross piece was carried by the prisoner to the place of execution. Other variations had the cross in the shape of our capital ‘T’ as well as straight poles. There was even one which looked like an ‘X.’ Usually one form was favored by particular bands of soldiers but even there they sometimes experimented with different designs. Some think that the entire cross would have been too heavy for one man to manage so that the criminal would only carry the horizontal part of the cross. People choose up sides and argue over such things but the exact design of the cross is not the important part of it. Had the Son of God not been crucified on one, the Roman cross would have simply been one of those hidden details of history that only geeks and geniuses knew about.

“At the site of execution, by law, the victim was given a bitter drink of wine mixed with myrrh (gall) as a mild analgesic (*pain reliever*). The criminal was then thrown to the ground on his back, with his arms outstretched along the patibulum (the horizontal cross-piece). The hands could be nailed or tied to the crossbar, but nailing apparently was preferred by the Romans. The archaeological remains of a crucified body, found in an ossuary near Jerusalem and dating from the time of Christ, indicate that the nails were tapered iron spikes approximately 5 to 7 in (13 to 18 cm) long with a square shaft 3/8 in (1 cm) across. Furthermore, ossuary findings and the Shroud of Turin have documented that the nails commonly were driven through the wrists rather than the palms. After both arms were fixed to the crossbar, the patibulum and the victim, together, were lifted onto the stipes.

“Next, the feet were fixed to the cross, either by nails or ropes. Ossuary findings and the Shroud of Turin suggest that nailing was the preferred Roman practice. Although the feet could be fixed

to the sides of the stipes or to a wooden footrest (suppedaneum), they usually were nailed directly to the front of the stipes. To accomplish this, flexion of the knees may have been quite prominent, and the bent legs may have been rotated laterally.

“When the nailing was completed, the titulus was attached to the cross, by nails or cords, just above the victim’s head. The soldiers and the civilian crowd often taunted and jeered the condemned man, and the soldiers customarily divided up his clothes among themselves. The length of survival generally ranged from three or four hours to three or four days and appears to have been inversely related to the severity of the scourging. However, even if the scourging had been relatively mild, the Roman soldiers could hasten death by breaking the legs below the knees (crurifragium or skelokopia).

“Not uncommonly, insects would light upon or burrow into the open wounds or the eyes, ears, and nose of the dying and helpless victim, and birds of prey would tear at these sites. Moreover, it was customary to leave the corpse on the cross to be devoured by predatory animals. However, by Roman law, the family of the condemned could take the body for burial, after obtaining permission from the Roman judge. Since no one was intended to survive crucifixion, the body was not released to the family until the soldiers were sure that the victim was dead. By custom, one of the Roman guards would pierce the body with a sword or lance. Traditionally, this had been considered a spear wound to the heart through the right side of the chest—a fatal wound probably taught to most Roman soldiers. The Shroud of Turin documents this form of injury. Moreover, the standard infantry spear, which was 5 to 6 ft (1.5 to 1.8 m) long, could easily have reached the chest of a man crucified on the customary low cross.”

(Quotes are taken from a piece found on the Internet, “On the Physical Death of Jesus Christ,” by William D. Edwards, MD; Wesley J. Gabel, MDiv; Floyd E. Hosmer, MS, AMI)

Crucifixion, by hanging the weight of the body on the outstretched arms, made breathing very difficult and one could only get a full breath by pulling up with his arms against the nails through the wrists and pushing up with the legs against the nails through the feet. The process was extremely painful and many of the crucifixion deaths, no doubt, resulted from asphyxiation as fatigue and pain made breathing impossible. Thus, we have the seven statements of Jesus from the cross being very brief.

Some have speculated concerning the cause of Jesus’ death but we are to remember what He said about Himself and what the gospel writers recorded about His death.

John 10:17-18

17 Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again.

18 No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father.

Mark 15:37

37 And Jesus cried with a loud voice, and gave up the ghost.

Luke 23:46

46 And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I

commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost.

John 19:30

30 When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost.

Therefore, we do not believe that any organ of Jesus body gave out on Him or that His death was from natural causes although there were a number of things that happened which might have caused death in an ordinary purpose. He held on to His life until His Work was finished and then He released His Spirit which departed from the body. He died by vacating His body, not from the wounds which He had received.

So, what things did Jesus find so important to say that He forced Himself up against the pain in order to get a breath?

This is the list in the order they were said, so far as the scholars can determine:

1. Luke 23:34: “and Jesus said, Father, forgive them: for they know not what they do...”
2. Luke 23:43, to the thief who asked for mercy: “Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in Paradise.”
3. John 19:27, to Mary, His mother, concerning John: “Woman, behold, thy son!” Same reference, to John: “Behold, thy mother!”
4. Matt 27:46, to the Father: “My God, my God, why has Thou forsaken me?”
5. John 19:28, to the soldiers: “I thirst.”
6. John 19:30, “It is Finished.”
7. Luke 23:46, to the Father: “Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit.”

“...Father, forgive them: for they know not what they do...”

Only Luke records this saying of Jesus from the cross. Several questions come to mind in regard to it.

Was Jesus asking this for the soldiers who were actually doing the work, having been commanded to do so by their superiors?

Or, did He have in mind the Jews also who had called and lobbied for His execution?

Or, was it all of those who came to see Him that day, the ones who mocked and derided Him as He hung on the cross?

It seems to me that surely the soldiers would have been the most direct objects of His prayer since in all four gospels they are the immediate audience and these first words were *seemingly* spoken before any of the people were allowed to come near. Certainly the soldiers would have kept the people away until they had finished their work lest they interfere and cause something to do wrong.

How strange those words must have sounded to these men who had just been brutalizing and mocking Him. It was a soldier who had beaten Him. All of them had been in on the crown of thorns and the mock worship. Now, they have just finished nailing Him to the cross and hoisting Him up to die.

No doubt the most regular experience for these soldiers at such moments had been for the prisoner to berate them and curse them, some maybe hoping for a quick end to their life. Others, I am sure, wept and pled, screamed and moaned, cried and begged for mercy. But this one, this calm man who had bravely endured all that they had heaped upon them, pushed Himself up against those nails through His feet and gathered enough breath to ask His Father for a favor, that these rough and brutal soldiers, who really did have no idea Who it was that they were crucifying, might be forgiven of this horrendous act, seeing that they were operating, at least in the beating and the crucifixion, on orders from their superiors.

But we should also bear in mind that they had just been tormenting Him on their own volition. No one had told them to make a crown of thorns and put on Him, that was their idea to mock the notion that He was a king. And no one had told them to beat Him on the head with the rod they had given Him as a mock scepter. Neither had they been commanded to bow down to Him in pretend worship. All of that had been their idea of fun, mocking the One Who was to be crucified, acting out their cruelty and trying to impress each other with their adolescent humor. Now He is praying for their forgiveness as they gamble over what little He is leaving behind, His clothes.

And, did He intend to be asking merely for forgiveness for the sin of crucifying Him or for all of their sins? It seems that their immediate commander, after it was all over, came to a place of faith.

Mark, Matthew and Luke all give testimony to the words of the Centurion.

Matt 27:50-54

- 50 Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost.
- 51 And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent;
- 52 And the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose,
- 53 And came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many.
- 54 Now when the centurion, and they that were with him, watching Jesus, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God.

Mark 15:37-39

- 37 And Jesus cried with a loud voice, and gave up the ghost.
- 38 And the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom.
- 39 And when the centurion, which stood over against him, saw that he so cried out, and gave up the ghost, he said, Truly this man was the Son of God.

Luke 23:44-47

- 44 And it was about the sixth hour, and there was a darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour.
- 45 And the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was rent in the midst.
- 46 And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost.
- 47 Now when the centurion saw what was done, he glorified God, saying, Certainly

this was a righteous man.

Undoubtedly, some question, “well, which did he say, ‘this was the Son of God’ or ‘this was a righteous man.’” Personally, I am sure this he said both, “this was a righteous man, this was the Son of God.”

Christian history has richly speculated on what became of this man but we have little real information. Tradition has it that his name was Longinus and that he was actually the one who pierced Jesus’ side. It is recorded that he not only became a believer but left the Roman military to preach the gospel. Both the Roman Catholic and the Greek Orthodox churches regard him as one of their saints and died as a martyr. It is also recorded in tradition that at least two of the soldiers under his command also believed. Personally, I will not be surprised if I see them all that the Great Judgment on the Right Hand side of the Lord of Glory, all of those who actually participated in His crucifixion redeemed by the One Whom they crucified.

But, was Jesus thinking and praying any wider than the soldiers? Did His prayers also include the Jews who came to mock Him and cast His Own words back in His teeth? There is no way truly to know but we do know that on and after the Day of Pentecost thousands of Jews and many of the priests came to faith. Would it not be a marvelous thing to discover one day that every person who laid their eyes on the Dying Savior, regardless of what frame of mind they were in on that day, eventually came to true and saving faith? Again, I will not be surprised to find out that the prayer of the Savior was completely and fully heard as well as answered in a complete way.

But, even if His prayer was only intended for the soldiers and even if it only requested that they not be held accountable for His crucifixion, what a marvelous and gracious prayer it was, showing that the Savior did not die with any bitterness or harshness toward those who had caused Him to suffer such agony, seeing that it was His ordained means to save His people from their sins. We know how hideously painful what they had done was to His body and how agonizing it was even to gather the air to speak this prayer out loud. Who does that? Who has that kind of love and compassion? Only a Person with the kind of love that it took to carry our sin in His body even as He dealt with the physical pain that He was enduring.

We get angry with people who hurt us, do we not? Especially those who do it just for fun, who enjoy it, who seek to make our torment as great as it can possibly be! Thousands upon thousands of those who believe in Jesus Christ have died horrible deaths at the hand of insane and demented persecutors whose only goal was to cause as much suffering as possible. We call them martyrs... and many of them, inspired by the example of Jesus, and enabled by the Grace that He gives, died also praying for their persecutors. What religion besides Christianity has such a testimony? Which religion has as their patron One Who demonstrated such compassion as this Nazarene Who died on the Roman cross?

I am reminded of the prayer of Jesus for those whom He identified as His Own.

John 17:6-11

- 6 I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world: thine they were, and thou gavest them me; and they have kept thy word.
- 7 Now they have known that all things whatsoever thou hast given me are of thee.

- 8 For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me.
- 9 I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine.
- 10 And all mine are thine, and thine are mine; and I am glorified in them.
- 11 And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are.

What an amazing thing is it to be prayed for. It is incredible when others whom we love pray for us, desiring before God our very best good. But when the Son of God prays for us, how blessed is that?

In the billions of people who live and have lived on our planet only a tiny fraction of them have been prayed for personally by anyone who truly knew God and could intelligently articulate prayers to Him.

But how amazingly few have been able to hear God's Own Son pray directly and specifically for them and in their hearing?

You know, soldiers who have been in combat, who have actually seen people die around them, develop a level of emotional callous against their feelings. They become difficult to move emotionally and I can only imagine what men like these who had, no doubt, killed many in combat and crucified many more, would have been like. They were hard men. But I imagine that something stirred within them as they heard this mangled mess of a man on the cross cry out to the Heavenly Father to forgive them for the brutality that they had heaped upon Him.

There are two great lessons in this first statement of Jesus from the Cross.

Remember what He taught from the Lord's Prayer?

Matt 6

- 9 After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.
- 10 Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.
- 11 Give us this day our daily bread.
- 12 And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.
- 13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.
- 14 For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you:
- 15 But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

And then again in the Parable?

Matt 18

- 21 Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?
- 22 Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven.
- 23 Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants.
- 24 And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents.
- 25 But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made.
- 26 The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.
- 27 Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt.
- 28 But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellowservants, which owed him an hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest.
- 29 And his fellowservant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.
- 30 And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt.
- 31 So when his fellowservants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done.
- 32 Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me:
- 33 Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee?
- 34 And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him.
- 35 So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.

Jesus did not preach one thing and then do another. That which He had taught the disciples, He actually acted out for all of humanity to see and know. He who would seek forgiveness is turned away and refused unless he is willing to forgive those who have wrong him.

The other lesson that we learn here is that if Jesus could forgiven these soldiers who had just brutalized Him, He can forgive you.

People fail. People sin. Sometimes their failure and their sin is profound, horrible, embarrassing and humiliating. Sometimes it is so bad, so profound, that they simply cannot see how they can ever be forgiven.

The record of events during these last days of Jesus' earthly life and the first days of the church stand forever to testify that this idea is simply false.

Jesus forgave the soldiers,
forgave the thief,
forgave Peter,

and then, not too long later, forgave Saul of Tarsus, the persecutor of His people.

I do not want you to think that sin is not awful. Whatever your's is, it is just as bad as and worse than you think. It is hideous, corrupt, wicked and inexcusable. No one should ever be forgiven of it and anyone who has done such a thing should be cast into the Lake of Fire.

That being said, Jesus Christ died on a Roman cross and bore the penalty for every sin of every person who would turn to Him in faith and repent.

So, yes, it is true. No matter what you have done, it can be forgiven if you will repent.

Will you repent?