

CHRIST CRUCIFIED.

In an age when human ingenuity taxed itself to the utmost limit to invent cruelties to torture the victims of public revenge or hate, crucifixion certainly had a bad pre-eminence. Among the Romans it was reserved, with few exceptions, for slaves and foreigners, being considered too horrible and disgraceful for a Roman citizen, no matter what might have been his crime. It was the greatest possible indignity that could be heaped upon any offender whether considered in the light of a public disgrace, or of physical anguish.

Crucifixion was a slow, lingering, horrible process of dying, lasting always many hours, and often for several days. The victim was usually bound to the cross as it lay upon the ground; the hands and feet were then nailed to the wood, and the cross elevated and planted in the socket prepared to receive it. This gave the body a terrible wrench and great was the agony which followed. The hot sun beat upon the naked body and uncovered head, (which in our Lord's case was pierced with the additional cruelty of the crown of thorns). The ragged, undressed wounds festered and inflamed and shooting pains darted from them through the quivering flesh. Added to this was the agony of an increasing fever, a throbbing head and a raging thirst; and even the slightest movement intensified the anguish. As death drew near, swarms of insects gathered about to increase the torment from which there could not be the slightest relief. As no vital organ was directly assailed, life lingered on until the power of endurance was completely exhausted.

Over the head of the sufferer was usually an inscription describing the crime for which he had been condemned. This was generally borne before him as he wended his way on foot to the place of execution bearing his heavy cross. In the case of our Lord, he bore his cross to the gates of the city where they met a man from Cyrene, Simon by name, whom they compelled to bear it the remainder of the way, doubtless because Jesus was too faint and exhausted.

It appears from certain rabbinical writings that a society of Jewish women was formed to alleviate the sufferings of those condemned to die. They accompanied the condemned to the place of execution and administered a prepared drink which acted as an anodyne to allay their pain. It was probably these who offered to our Lord the "vinegar and gall" (more properly – sour wine and myrrh) which he refused, preferring his mind to be clear and awake to the end. The drink offered him on the cross by one of the Roman soldiers, and accepted, was not the anodyne proffered and refused before, but simply sour wine, the common drink of the soldiers.

The ultimate physical cause of Christ's death is believed to have been literally a broken heart. Otherwise he would probably have lingered much longer. Crucifixion seldom produced death in less than twenty-four hours, and victims have lingered as long as five days. Pilate and the guard were surprised on learning of Jesus' death so soon. Instead of lingering long, he died suddenly, and before he was fully exhausted; for he had conversed with the thief and had commended his mother to the care of John; he had declared his great work finished and then with a loud [literally, a strong] voice which indicated considerable remaining strength both of body and mind he cried, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" and *instantly* died. In the agony of Gethsemane the heart and blood vessels were affected. The palpitation of the heart was so intense then as to cause bloody sweat, a phenomenon rare but not unknown, produced by intense mental excitement. Already weakened by such an experience, a repetition of the anguish probably ruptured the membrane of the heart causing instant death.

Such was the awful tragedy of Calvary which ended the human existence of our Lord, who thus gave himself as a lamb to the slaughter. "As a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth" when falsely accused, condemned and crucified. Had he exerted himself in self-defence either in Pilate's judgment hall, or in Gethsemane's garden, to speak again to the people as before, again doubtless they would have said "Never man spake like this man," and would have

hailed him their king as they did only five days before, saying Hosanna to the son of David, blessed is he that cometh as Jehovah's king. Or had he prayed to the Father, He could immediately have had a life-guard of more than twelve legions of angels. – Matt. 26:53.

He could have escaped the awful experience, but he did not do so, but *willingly* gave himself a *ransom* for sinners. He knew that his hour had come, when according to his Father's plan the world's redemption price should be paid. Remember his words to a disciple who attempted his defence – "Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father and he will presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? ***But how then shall the Scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?***"

Yes, the Scriptures must be fulfilled, they expressed the Father's will which he had come to do, hence the fulfilling of what was written, was the all-absorbing interest with him; the plan of God must be carried out at any cost, and to the execution of that plan he submitted himself in perfect obedience, even unto death, even the horrible, torturous, ignominious death of the cross.

Though our Lord submitted himself to death at this time because he recognized this to be the hour foretold by the prophets, he did not seem to understand clearly why so much public disgrace and torture of mind and body should accompany it. Hence his prayer, "O my Father, ***if it be possible***, let this cup pass from me. Nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt." (Matt. 26:39.) He well knew that baptism (immersion) into death, was his mission, and not for one moment could he think of avoiding it: and he knew too that with it must also come a bitter cup of suffering and shame: but not until his hour was almost come, did he seem to fully realize how bitter would be the dregs of that cup. Seeing that **[R960 : page 3] death** was the penalty for our sins, and not shame and misrepresentation, left room for our Lord to question the Father's wisdom and love, in apparently asking him to endure more than was *needful* to redeem mankind. But he bowed to the Father's wisdom and love in it all, saying – Thy will, not mine be done! In the light of

the Apostle's words we can see that the perfect "man Christ Jesus" was not only redeeming men, but by his obedience even unto death – even the death of the cross, he was proving himself *worthy* of high exaltation to the perfection of the divine nature, which because of this implicit and even blind obedience he has now attained. (Phil. 2:9.) So too in his last moments, in being treated exactly like the sinner whose *ransom* he was giving, when mental communion with the Father was interrupted and he felt for the moment *alone*, separated from the Father, cut off and condemned *as the sinner* whom he represented, it was more than he could bear – He cried with a loud voice My God! My God! *Why hast thou forsaken me?* This was more severe than all else, the very dregs of this cup of suffering. Not until afterward was the necessity and wisdom and love of this part of the Father's plan made manifest. Up to that hour he had communion with his God. – See Jno. 16:32.

What a lesson on obedience was thus furnished to every creature of God, in every age, and on every plane of existence – an obedience which bowed in loving submission to the will of God even in blindness as to *why* it should be so, and even under the most heart-rending trial. What a glorious character for our example and imitation! perfect submission to the will of God and perfect confidence, which implicitly trusted the Almighty Father where it could not trace him.

