

## Crucifixion Without The Cross

26 Now as they led Him away, they laid hold of a certain man, Simon a Cyrenian, who was coming from the country, and on him they laid the cross that he might bear *it* after Jesus. 27 And a great multitude of the people followed Him, and women who also mourned and lamented Him. 28 But Jesus, turning to them, said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children.

29 "For indeed the days are coming in which they will say, 'Blessed *are* the barren, wombs that never bore, and breasts which never nursed!' 30 "Then they will begin to say to the mountains, "Fall on us!" and to the hills, "Cover us!" 31 "For if they do these things in the green wood, what will be done in the dry?" (Lk. 23:26-31)

In 2004, Mel Gibson released the movie *The Passion of the Christ*, a depiction mostly of the final twelve hours of Jesus' life. It is known for its graphic portrayal of the violence and horror of the cross. The film became the highest grossing R-rated movie in the United States, and received three Academy Award nominations. I haven't seen it, and don't plan to, but the phenomenon of a movie like that reveals something which the world does not understand, and which some Christians do not understand: there is a difference between the crucifixion, and the cross.

But there is no way that Gibson, or any other filmmaker for that matter could capture on film the meaning of the Cross.

You cannot have the cross without the crucifixion. But it is possible to have the crucifixion without the cross. Plenty of people use Good Friday as a day of weeping over the physical agony of Jesus, or even trying to practice some of that themselves in a form of penance. Plenty of people may wear crucifixes as jewellery without understanding the meaning of the Cross.

We encounter this very phenomenon when Jesus spoke to some women on His way up to Calvary. As we study these words of Jesus, we can understand the difference between the crucifixion and the cross.

It is somewhere between 8 and 9 in the morning, and Jesus has spent the last twelve hours without sleep. After eating the Passover Meal, and then the Last Supper after that, once Judas had left the room, Jesus walked with His disciples over to Gethsemane. During that walk, Jesus gave them one of the most precious discourses about the Christian life, what is recorded in John 14 through 16. There Jesus explains what it is going to mean to walk with Him once He is gone, by the person of the Holy Spirit. They get to Gethsemane, it is perhaps there that Jesus prays the High Priestly prayer of John 17, before begging His father to let this cup pass from Him. Sweating drops of blood in prayer, Jesus eventually wakes his sleeping disciples when Judas arrives with soldiers and betrays him with a kiss.

That begins a very long night of trials. Jesus is first examined by the former High Priest, Annas. He then is examined by Caiphas in an illegal trial before dawn. Jesus is mocked and beaten. After dawn, he is again formally tried before the Sanhedrin.

Once they have found him guilty of blasphemy, they march Him off to Pilate before Jerusalem wakes up, and they accuse Him of rebellion against Rome. Pilate hears Jesus is from Galilee, and knows that Herod, ruler of Galilee is in Jerusalem, so he has Jesus sent to Herod. Herod questions Jesus, but when he gets nothing from Jesus, puts a royal robe on Jesus and sends Him back to Pilate. Pilate then tries to offer to have Jesus released, which the crowd rejects. He then has Jesus given over to the Roman cohort to be manhandled and abused by them. Once He has been brutalised, scourged and beaten, Pilate brings Him out again to see if the crowd will be satisfied. They are not, and so Pilate gives in to the crowd, washes his hands, and gives permission for Jesus to be crucified.

Jesus is again handed over to the Roman cohort as they make preparations for crucifixion. Here the garrison mocks Jesus, spit on Him, beat Him, and place a crown of thorns on His head.

Finally, when everything is ready, Jesus begins the march to Golgotha, north of the walls of Jerusalem, from the Praetorium, carrying the horizontal beam of His cross.

The beam probably weighed around 45 kilograms, which would tire a fit and fresh person after a few minutes. But to carry that for half a kilometre, when you have not slept, have been beaten and tortured, lost much blood, and your body is already in shock, is impossible.

Jesus collapses under the strain, and the Romans grab a bystander, Simon, to carry Jesus' cross for Him. And here is what is amazing: with all this going on around Him, utter exhaustion, looming death, Romans prodding Him up to Calvary, with some of the crowd cheering, and some weeping, some just staring, Jesus stops to address some women.

He hadn't answered the scribes and Pharisees during the Jewish trial. He hadn't answered Herod during that interview. He had barely answered Pilate.

But He stops to speak to these women. This was important enough to stop and say.

28 But Jesus, turning to them, said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children.

Jesus says, you are crying, but not for the right thing. You are weeping, but your tears should be spent on something else. If you are pitying Me, then you have missed the point of what this all means. You are focused on the crucifixion, but not on the cross. If we understand what Jesus means, we will understand the difference between the crucifixion and the cross. We can draw out two distinctions between these two things.

And that's important for understanding what we should believe and trust in, particularly on this day.

## **I. The Crucifixion Mourns Jesus' Death, The Cross Mourns Judgement Deserved**

29 "For indeed the days are coming in which they will say, 'Blessed are the barren, wombs that never bore, and breasts which never nursed!' 30 "Then they will begin to say to the mountains, "Fall on us!" and to the hills, "Cover us!" 31 "For if they do these things in the green wood, what will be done in the dry?" (Lk. 23:26-31)

Jesus says, you can weep over my crucifixion. You can weep over the pain I am about to face, and the death I will die. But that is not the true significance of this moment. That is simply the crucifixion. But the meaning of the Cross had to do not with physical pain, but with judgement.

You see, Jesus was the predicted Messiah of Israel and of the whole world. He had offered Himself to Israel as their true Moses, as their ultimate Aaron, and their final David. But while some responded, many did not. Many were lukewarm. Many were cowardly in the face of the Pharisees. And the religious leaders outrightly rejected him.

Since Israel had rejected Messiah taking their punishment, taking their judgement, what that meant was the judgement was coming upon Israel.

Jesus looks into the future and knows what is coming to this city of Jerusalem. He sees with His eternal eyes the year 70 A.D. with the Roman General Titus besieging the city of Jerusalem. As the siege went on, Jews began even turning on their own families, even eating their young to survive. When the walls came down, Titus slaughtered 1 000 000 Jews, and took 95 000 captive.

And in this time, Jesus looks ahead and says that those who are barren will be blessed. You have to know what a completely upside-down statement that would be to Jews who prized bearing children. But in this time, Jesus said, the barren would be envied, those who had never nursed babies would

be in a better position. And it was so in 70 AD. And as Jesus thinks on these things – he says – weep for yourselves and your children who will face these things.

Weep over the judgement that unrepentant sin brings upon itself. Weep over what you could have been saved from.

Jerusalem had been offered King Jesus, and had said no. Jesus had wept over Jerusalem Himself: 41 Now as He drew near, He saw the city and wept over it, 42 saying, "If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things *that make* for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. 43 "For days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, 44 "and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation." (Lk. 19:41-44)

Sometimes when predicting the fall of Jerusalem, Jesus' prophecy telescopes into the last days, the years of the Tribulation. He does that here again. The descriptions sound very much like descriptions of the Tribulation period found in Revelation.

16 and said to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! (Rev. 6:16)

6 In those days men will seek death and will not find it; they will desire to die, and death will flee from them. (Rev. 9:6)

Can you imagine a time when people will long for death? When people will want to be buried alive? Can you picture a time when God will so shake this world that the kings, the rich men, the great ones hide in caves and rocks?

31 "For if they do these things in the green wood, what will be done in the dry?" (Lk. 23:26-31)

Jesus said, if they do these things in the green tree, what shall be done in the dry? In other words – if Rome does this to Me – an innocent man, the green tree – what will they do to you, Israel who is guilty, a dry tree? If God should so pour judgement upon His innocent Son, and let Him face scoffing, abuse, torture and temporary abandonment by God – what will God do to the guilty, God-rejecting sinner?

Jesus looks ahead to that and says, don't weep over my crucifixion. Weep over the judgement that the Cross could have saved you from. Weep over the judgement that your sin will bring. Weep at the thought of your family, friends, loved ones, colleagues, and perhaps even yourselves if you do not know the Lord going through that time.

Feel grief not over the physical death and pain of one man, but over the grievous pain that sin has brought to the world. Weep over what it continues to bring, what it will yet bring.

“Ye need not weep because Christ died one-tenth so much as because your sins rendered it necessary that he should die. You need not weep over the crucifixion, but weep over your transgression, for your sins nailed the Redeemer to the accursed tree. To weep over a dying Saviour is to lament the remedy; it were wiser to bewail the disease.” - Spurgeon

Ye who think of sin but lightly  
Nor suppose the evil great  
Here may view its nature rightly,  
Here its guilt may estimate  
Mark the Sacrifice appointed  
See who bears the awful load  
'Tis the Word, the Lord's Anointed,  
Son of Man and Son of God.

If we weep over the pain Jesus faced, we are only looking at the crucifixion. If we weep over the judgement sin brings, we are looking at the cross.

But there is a second aspect to understanding the difference between the crucifixion and the cross.

## II. The Crucifixion Mourns Jesus' Pain, The Cross Mourns Jesus' Propitiation

The women were weeping because Jesus was about to suffer. In recent years, movies have been made which seek to show the gore and agony and pain of crucifixion. And those graphic depictions of torture may move us to great pity or even horror at what crucifixion was, but it is impossible to capture on film what the cross was about.

In fact, at least one community in the Philippines attempts to reenact the crucifixion, with men actually having nails put through their hands and feet, to gain penance and forgiveness of sins.

And there people stand mourning Jesus' pain, but missing the true meaning of the Cross.

In fact, if you really want to understand what the Cross meant to Jesus, you cannot simply look at the events of Friday. To understand what made the Cross so much more than a crucifixion, you must go back twelve hours and meet Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Mark 14:32 Then they came to a place which was named Gethsemane; and He said to His disciples, "Sit here while I pray." 33 And He took Peter, James, and John with Him, and He began to be troubled and deeply distressed.

They arrive at Gethsemane which was a fairly small enclosed Garden, some have calculated not more than seventy steps square, a place with some fruit trees, shrubs, probably a privately-owned, quiet resting place. It had been made available to Jesus whenever He and His disciples were in Jerusalem. At the entrance, Jesus leaves eight of the eleven remaining apostles, and takes with Him Peter, James, and John. These, His inner three, the ones that He took with Him up on the Mount of Transfiguration, the ones He took with Him for the resurrection of Jairus' daughter. He wants His closest friends with Him, because something is beginning to open up to Him. Something is beginning to be revealed to Him, and He needs His deepest supporters.

Jesus is starting to see something, starting to preview something, and the effect upon Him is a Jesus we have not met before in the Gospels.

Verse 33 says He began to be *troubled* and *deeply distressed*. The word for *troubled* in the original means a kind of alarm. It speaks of astonished terror. A kind of shocked horror has come into the soul of Jesus. Deeply distressed, a severe heaviness of soul, a powerful, overwhelming stress is visibly disturbing Jesus. This is not a Jesus we have seen before. This is not a Jesus that Peter, James, and John had ever seen before.

34 Then He said to them, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch."

He tells them His state. Within, He is experiencing overwhelming sorrow. The word here means a kind of grief that encompasses you and swallows you up. Jesus is experiencing a kind of black pit of awful grief that is threatening to kill Him before His sacrificial death. He asks them to stay and watch in prayer.

What is Jesus seeing that is doing this to Him? What is Jesus previewing?

Jesus is previewing what it will mean to drink the cup of God's anger on the cross. Jesus is beginning to smell the contents of that cup. Flashes of the vision of God the Father treating Him as the sin-bearer are coming to His consciousness, and they are like arrows through His heart. He is previewing the meaning and the experience of being a substitute for sinners, and internally, it seems to be more than He can bear.

35 He went a little farther, and fell on the ground, and prayed that if it were possible, the hour might pass from Him.

He goes beyond the three, leaving them to pray alone, and the weight of His trial brings Him physically to the ground. This King, for whom demons, deformity, disease, and death could be waved away with a word, is physically staggering under this weight. He is so burdened, He crumples down to the ground. He can not even remain physically upright, so deep is the horror of what is coming.

What was in that cup? What is coming in that hour that He wished it would pass from Him? Please remember that Jesus was not surprised at the thought of His coming crucifixion. He had been calmly predicting that for months. He had told His disciples that He came to give His life a ransom for many. His sacrificial death had been His mission from the beginning. But what had mercifully been withheld from the human consciousness of Jesus was what it would mean to become the object of the Father's displeasure. No, Jesus was fully prepared to face crucifixion, as a form of torture and death. That is not what is burdening Jesus.

Jesus Christ: fully God and truly human. And in His humanity, Jesus had not during His earthly sojourn experienced anything except unbroken fellowship and delight from His Father. But God the Father had apparently kept from Jesus' human consciousness the full weight of what Calvary would mean. And here it begins to break upon Him, and He sees and knows the horror of what is coming. He will stand alone, suspended between Heaven and Earth, as the hurricane of God's fury and holy hatred of sin come crashing down upon Him and Him alone. Not only will He lose fellowship with the Father, the Father will treat Jesus as the Substitute for all sinners and all sin. And just take one sinner, one Hitler, one Stalin, and ask what should be done to Him. But now take all people, and all sin, and the full debt to God's glory, and pour it on one soul. Jesus is going to experience an intensity of anger, displeasure, wrath, fury, and hatred that is more violent than any attack any man has known. This is what the Bible calls propitiation. God the Son absorbing and satisfying the wrathful judgement of God upon sin.

12 I was at ease, but He has shattered me; He also has taken me by my neck, and shaken me to pieces; He has set me up for His target, 13 His archers surround me. He pierces my heart and does not pity; He pours out my gall on the ground. 14 He breaks me with wound upon wound; He runs at me like a warrior.  
(Job 16:12-14)

The hymnwriter put it this way:

Tell me, ye who see Him groaning, was there ever grief like His?  
Friends through fear His cause disowning, Foes insulting His distress  
Many hands were raised to wound Him, none would interpose to save,  
But the **deepest stroke that pierced Him, was the stroke that Justice gave.**

The text does not explicitly say that Jesus wept here in the Garden. But I find it hard to imagine that he did not. Hebrews 5:7 describes something that I think best fits Gethsemane: who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear, (Heb. 5:7) Jesus wept before God over this matter. Here is where the weeping belongs – not over the physical pain, but over the spiritual propitiation.

Jesus prays that if it be possible, this hour could pass from Him. Verse 36 tells us the content of His prayer, which He would repeat three times.

36 And He said, "Abba, Father, all things are possible for You. Take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will."

Jesus is asking, Father, is there no other way to do this? If we can achieve this redemption without this, if we can achieve this salvation without Me bearing Your fury, let it be so. The Gospel of Luke tells us that His prayer was so intense, that His sweat was mixed with blood, which is in fact a medical condition that exists. Three times, Jesus is going to ask the Father, if by any chance, the omnipotent God, who can do all things, can reconcile man to God through some other means. And what answer does Jesus receive from His Father?

Silence. Or if we may, the equivalent of the silence, "It is not possible. There is no other way."

And right there, we should stop and understand the meaning of Gospel grace. God the Father was not willing to say *yes* to His own Son's pleas for another way. God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son. God did not love mankind more than His Son, but God loved His glory and His plan for the salvation of sinners more than unbroken fellowship with His Son. And the Son, look at His words: "Nevertheless, not what I will, but what you will." The Son submits to the Father. The Son loved us so much that He was willing to embrace that there was no other way.

I don't believe you will find in all of human history, a more courageous, heroic act. Here is majestic bravery, worthy of our deepest admiration. Jesus, who feels our weaknesses, and has felt the deepest struggles, embraces the hardest and most horrific path – to be a wrath-bearer for the world. Jesus was already prepared for the crucifixion. But it is in Gethsemane that Jesus was prepared for the Cross.

Jesus says, Don't weep for me and my pain. That would be weeping over the crucifixion. Weep for yourselves, for the judgement deserved, for the judgement that sin brings. And we might add, if you are going to weep over what Jesus went through, weep not about the physical pain of the crucifixion, but weep over what Jesus wept over: the propitiation that He achieved on the Cross.

How great the pain of searing loss  
The Father turns His face away  
As wounds which mar the Chosen One  
Bring many sons to glory

It was my sin that held Him there  
Until it was accomplished  
His dying breath has brought me life  
I know that it is finished.

You may have watched a movie, and seen a depiction of the crucifixion. But it is the Holy Spirit who takes the Word of God and shows you the cross. You will know you have seen the crucifixion and the cross when you are no longer feeling sorry for Jesus, but feeling grief over judgement, no longer feeling pity on Jesus' pain, but praise for His taking your and my penalty.