

The Brutal Beauty of the Cross

Have you ever wondered why Jesus was so brutally beaten before He was crucified? Was it just to fulfill O.T. prophecies? While His scourging and other persecutions did satisfy the ancient predictions of God's spokesmen, I'm quite certain Pilate and his torturous underlings didn't know or care one whit about them. However, last Sunday, while partaking of the memorial commemorating His death, and as I reflected on the pre-crucifixion brutality He endured, something dawned on me...

Though I've never looked into it specifically, I'm fairly certain the Romans severely beat most if not all of those they crucified. Think about it: how difficult would it be to hold a man down on a cross sufficiently to be able to drive a spike through his hands (or wrists) and feet (or ankles or heels) in order to crucify him? The subject would fight and kick with all his might to avoid the excruciating anguish of being nailed to a cross. And being aware of the forthcoming agony of being suspended upright for hours before finally succumbing to exhaustion and the suffocation which inevitably followed would surely imbue the subject with almost superhuman strength to stave off his crucifiers at all costs. Surely, beating him until "There is no fight left in him" would be the most efficacious way to accomplish the gruesome task of crucifixion.

While I have long been concerned that an over-emphasis of the brutality of the Cross in all of its gory details can contribute to an overshadowing of its spiritual motivation and significance, there is no doubt that knowledge of the physical horrors of death by crucifixion make Jesus' submissive willingness to "go there" all the more beautiful. While I'm pretty sure every man the Romans crucified had to be beaten until "There was no fight left in him" to get them to let alone *on* their crosses, such was not the case with Jesus.

- He went to Jerusalem **willingly** knowing full-well what awaited Him there, Matthew 17:22-23.
- He went to Gethsemane **willingly** knowing full-well that there He would be betrayed, John 13:21-27; Matthew 26:47-50.
- He went to Gethsemane **willingly** know full-well that those closest to Him would all "*fall away*" and desert and deny Him, Matthew 26:31-36.
- He went with his arrestors **willingly** knowing full-well that He would not be "released unharmed," Matthew 26:51-56.
- He went back and forth between the High Priest, the Sanhedrin, Pilate, and Herod **willingly** knowing full-well that none of them would exonerate Him, Luke 22:54 – 23:25.
- He went with the soldiers **willingly** knowing full-well that they were commissioned to beat Him near to death, Matthew 27:27-31.
- He went to Golgotha **willingly** knowing full-well that it was a place not just of crucifixion, but the place of *His* crucifixion, Matthew 27:32-33.
- He went to His cross **willingly** knowing full-well that although He had the power to "*save Yourself*" and "*come down from the cross*" as the passersby mockingly urged, He wouldn't, Matthew 27:37-40.

- He went to (and through) the agonies of the Cross **willingly** without the pain-numbing mixture of “*wine mixed with myrrh*” offered knowing full-well the cost of refusal, Matthew 27:34.
- He went to and stayed on that cross **willingly** know full-well what it meant for the souls of all mankind- even those who crucified Him, Luke 23:34.

Don't let the awful brutality of the crucifixion dominate your feelings toward or your view of the Cross. The *physical* suffering of the Savior, though very much a part of the story, isn't its real point. Instead, always look to the wondrous *spiritual* beauty of Him who willingly and resolutely went to Golgotha with the full knowledge of what it would cost Him personally... and what it would buy *eternally*. The physical cost was indeed hideously tremendous, but the love for the souls of all mankind that made it worth the price to Jesus, well, that is *spiritually* priceless. (Philip C. Strong; Southport Church of Christ; 7202 Madison Ave, Indianapolis, IN 46227; online at southportcofc.org; email to mrpcstrong@hotmail.com)