

How perfectly the Man Christ Jesus subjected Himself to the humiliation, the injustice, the rejection, the mocking, the heartless brutality, the endless excruciating pain, the exhaustion, the thirst, (the flies?), the loss of blood, the suffocation that accompanies crucifixion. John doesn't mention the greatest agony of all, His being forsaken of God while bearing our sins in His own body on the tree, Deuteronomy 21:23; 1Peter 2:24; Galatians 3:13.

Pilate clearly despised the Jews he governed and seemed to be disgusted with their hypocritical piety. And he had to hate their incessant (often successful) attempts to manipulate him. They clearly knew which "buttons to push" to get their way with him. Anything that might appear to question the absolute authority of Caesar struck terror in Pilate's heart. The Roman Empire is said to have prided itself in its *law and order* government and its absolute justice. Governors who could not maintain that standard were at risk of recall and punishment. The Jews had at least three major parties that had endless public disputes, as we have noticed in reading the gospels. This disorder was the plague of Roman authorities. The Jews knew this and could shrewdly manipulate a governor. Paradoxically these feuding parties were united in their hatred of Jesus (their unrecognized Messiah) and in their condemnation of Him before Pilate.

Pilate became frightened when Jesus responded that He was indeed a King and that any authority Pilate had he had received from God. He went before the crowd with Jesus arrayed in the crown of thorns, and the purple robe. Behold the Man! Pilate may have meant this spectacle as a mockery of their nation, but when they told him that Jesus had claimed to be the Son of God Pilate may have had at least an inkling who this was before him. He became more afraid. But he was cornered by his own pride and fear of man. Fear of both the crowd and the ruthless Caesar. Too proud to admit his error and bow to Jesus and release Him. That would have meant giving up his powerful position as Governor to follow Jesus. (Perhaps he would have suffered as the first Gentile martyr.) He could not have prevented Jesus' death for it was foretold in many prophecies but he would have been in heaven with the Lord now, not alone in Hades.

Pilate had a tiger by the tail so to speak. He had to make clear it was the Jews who had rejected Jesus in favor of Caesar, justifying his crucifying Jesus. We have no king but Caesar! Fateful words of an unbelieving generation who would be crushed and scattered worldwide by Caesar 40 years later when they attempted to rebel.

Why were the Roman soldiers so cruel? They were career soldiers, often involuntary recruits, hardened to abuse and suffering, some being victims themselves, perhaps from birth. Still they were men that needed the Savior and some heard His words as they drove the nails, "Father forgive them for they know not what they do".

John stood with Jesus' mother Mary watching her son

suffering amidst all the jeers and taunts. He was God's Son, her Savior and Lord. Jesus, saw His mother there alone (apparently forsaken by her sons and daughters) except for her sister also named Mary. Seeing her He addressed her with the most honorable feminine title of that day. (What would He have called her in today's language and culture?) "Woman, behold thy son" and, looking to John, "behold thy mother." Jesus, as the eldest son of his widowed mother, fulfilled his responsibility for her care. He committed her to the disciple He loved, John. Apparently none of her other offspring were believers nor worthy of that trust. The other disciples were not there either. John took her to his home, under his protection and care. (John, though a fisherman, was a son in a prosperous family seafood business. He had a residence in Jerusalem as well as in Galilee where their fishing boats were.)

John carefully marked the central place of Jesus' cross between two thieves. Other accounts report them railing on Jesus and one later repenting, Luke 23:_. They represent the whole human race under condemnation but some, upon repentance, receiving eternal life. As the day drew to a close the soldiers, as ordered, broke the legs of the thieves to hasten their deaths, Deuteronomy 21:23.

The torture of crucifixion is ingenious cruelty. In order to breathe the victim, hanging by his arms, had to raise himself on his nailed feet in order to take each breath. Breaking one's legs prevented this and he quickly suffocated. But Jesus, when He had completed the bearing of our sins and fulfilled all prophetic predictions, gave a resounding cry of triumph "It is Finished." Then He simply bowed His head and gave up His human spirit to His Father. "Father into Thy hands I commend my Spirit." He did not die from weakness and suffocation, or broken bones (as prophesied, Exodus 12:46; Numbers 9:12; Psalm 24:20). The soldier's spear showed that He had not died from loss of blood. Rapid death was not a goal of crucifixion. The soldier who speared the Lord's hanging corpse was fulfilling his assignment to hasten the death of the crucified. Whether malicious or not, he assured (and ensured) Jesus was indeed dead. This fact signaled to all creation that God had accepted Jesus' work on the cross as finished and complete because He had received Jesus' spirit. No man has ever successfully commended his spirit to God and died. This was not suicide! No weapon or poison was involved. Some men have wished to die. In the future under the wrath of God many will wish to die and be unable, Revelation 9:6. But certainly no man while in the grave has ever taken his spirit again and risen from the dead by his own power, and not by another's. Jesus had announced that He had been given authority to do both, and He did, John 10:17,18.

His dignified and loving burial, arranged by two wealthy disciples, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, was attended by the faithful women who had watched the crucifixion from afar. They didn't realize it was not to be for long.

By Ronald Canner, September 28, 2011.