

THE CONTENDER

Contending For The Faith Once For All Delivered To The Saints (Jude 3)

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"FOR CHRIST ALSO HATH ONCE SUFFERED FOR SINS..." (I Pet. 3:18)

The physical suffering of Jesus began in Gethsemane where Luke said, "...and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground." (Lk. 22:44) Many attempts have been made by modern scholars to explain away this phrase but the phenomenon, though rare, Hematidrosis--bloody sweat is well documented. Under great emotional stress, tiny capillaries in the sweat glands can break, thus mixing blood with sweat. This alone could have produced marked weakness or possible shock.

After the betrayal and arrest and one beating the next morning finds Jesus battered and bruised, dehydrated and exhausted from a sleepless night. He is then taken to Pilate for further scourging. The prisoner is stripped of his clothing and his hands are tied to a post above his head. The Roman legionnaire steps forward with the flagrum in his hand. This is a short whip consisting of several heavy leather thongs with two small balls of lead attached at the end of each. The heavy whip is brought down with full force again and again across the shoulders back and legs. At first the heavy tongs cut through the skin only. Then, as the blows continue, they cut deeper into the capillaries and veins of the skin, and finally spurting arterial bleeding from vessels in the underlying muscles. The small balls of lead first produce large, deep bruises which are broken open by subsequent blows. Finally the skin of the back is hanging in long ribbons and the entire area is an unrecognizable mass of torn, bleeding tissue. When it is determined that the man is near death the beating is stopped.

Half fainting, Jesus is then untied and allowed to slump to the stone pavement, wet in his own blood. The soldiers see a great joke in this provincial Jew claiming to be a king. They throw a robe across his shoulders and place a reed in his hand for a scepter. They still need a crown. A small bundle of flexible branches covered with long thornes (commonly used for firewood) are plaited into the shape of a crown and this pressed into his scalp. Again, there is copious bleeding (the scalp being one of the most vascular areas of the body). After mocking him and striking HIM across the face, the soldiers take the stick from his hand and strike him across the head driving the thorns deeper into his scalp. Finally they tire of their sadistic sport and the robe is torn from his back. This had already become adherent to the clots of blood and serum in the wounds and its removal just as in the careless removal of a surgical bandage, causes excruciating pain...almost as if he were again being whipped and the wounds again begin to bleed.

NEWS & NOTES: We are made to rejoice in that Mrs. Elisabeth McCleece availed herself of this sacrifice by being baptized into the death of Christ (Rom. 6:3,4) thereby becoming a Christian and we welcome her into the fellowship of the saints here at South Shore!

Later, after being too weak to carry what has been calculated to be 110 lbs 650 yards from the fortress Antonia to Golgotha the crucifixion begins. Simon is ordered to place the patibulum on the ground and Jesus is quickly thrown backward with his shoulders against the wood. The legionnaire feels for the depression at the front of the wrist. (Historical evidence and experimental work have shown that the nails were driven through the small bones of the wrist and not through the palms. Nails driven there would strip out between the fingers when they support the weight of the human body. The misconception may have come from Jesus' words to Thomas, "Observe my hands". Anatomists, both modern and ancient, have always considered the wrists as part of the hand.) He drives a heavy square wrought-iron nail through the wrist and deep into the wood. Quickly he moves to the other side and repeats the action, being careful not to pull the arms too tightly, but to allow



some flexation and movement. The patibulum is then lifted in place at the top of the stipes and the titulus reading "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews" is nailed in place.

The left foot is pressed backward against the right foot, with both feet extended, toes down, a nail is driven through the arch of each leaving the knees moderately flexed. The victim is now crucified and all that remains is to right the cross into the prepared hole with a bone-jarring, flesh-tearing jolt. As he now slowly sags down with more weight on the nails in the wrists, excruciating fiery pain shoots along the fingers and up the arms to explode in the brain--the nails in the wrists are putting pressure on the median nerves. As he pushes himself upward to avoid this stretching torment, he places his full weight on the nail in his feet. Again there is the searing agony of pain tearing through the nerves between the metatarsal bones of the feet.

At this point another phenomenon occurs. As the arms fatigue, great waves of cramps sweep over the muscles, knotting them in deep relentless throbbing pain. With these cramps comes the inability to push himself upward, and, hanging by the arms, the pectoral muscles are paralyzed and the intercostal muscles are unable to act. Air can be drawn into the lungs but it cannot be exhaled. Jesus fights to raise himself to get even one short breath. Finally carbon dioxide builds up in the lungs and in the blood stream and the cramps partially subside. Spasmodically, He is able to push himself upward to exhale and bring in the life-giving oxygen. It was undoubtedly during those periods that Jesus uttered the recorded seven short sentences. Hours of this limitless pain, cycles of twisting, joint rending cramps, intermittent partial asphyxiation, searing pain as tissue is torn from his lacerated back as he moves up and down against the rough timber. Then another agony begins. A deep crushing pain deep in the chest as the pericardium slowly fills with serum and begins to compress the heart.

Let us remember Ps. 22:14. "I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels." It is now almost over--the loss of tissue fluid has reached a critical level--the compressed heart is struggling to pump heavy, thick sluggish blood into the tissues--the tortured lungs are making a frantic effort to gasp in small gulps of air. The markedly dehydrated tissues send their flood of stimuli to the brain. Another verse from the 22 Psalm, "My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws and thou hast brought me to the dust of death."

With one last surge of strength, he once again presses his torn feet against the nail, straightens his legs, takes a deeper and last breath and utters his seventh and last cry, "Father into thy hands I commit my spirit." His mission of atonement completed he can now allow his body to die.

In order that the Sabbath not be profaned, the Jews asked that the condemned men be dispatched and removed from the crosses. The common method for ending a crucifixion was by crurifracture--the breaking of the leg bones. This prevented the victim from pushing himself upward; the tension could not be relieved from the muscles in the chest, and rapid suffocation occurred. The thieves legs were broken, but when they came to Jesus it was unnecessary. Apparently to make doubly sure of death, the legionnaire drove his lance through the 5th interspace between the ribs upward through the pericardium and into the heart. John 19:34 says, "And immediately there came out blood and water." Thus there was an escape of watery fluid from the sac surrounding the heart and blood from the interior of the heart. We have therefore rather conclusive post-mortem evidence that our Lord died, not the usual crucifixion death by suffocation, but of heart failure due to shock and constriction of the heart by fluid in the pericardium. (The Crucifixion Of Christ From A Medical Point Of View, C.T. Davis, MD, Shortened For Space)

Friend, can you imagine the Love Christ had for you to willingly do this knowing it was the only way to appease the Father's wrath for sin? You must be in His death where his blood was shed in order to be a Christian, a member of His Church. Obey the gospel today, escaping the wrath of an almighty God on those who reject His will! (Rom. 6:3,4; Acts 2:38, Mk. 16:16)