

70. It is finished!

March 4, 2012

You see this just about everywhere – on people’s necks, earlobe, books, grave sites, on the walls, on the signs as a symbol, or identification of one’s faith, or just because a person likes it. Especially in America where we still can express the freedom of our faith without any persecution, we can display this symbol as an expression of our faith in Jesus Christ. Yet, the majority of people who wear cross jewelries don’t have the foggiest idea what was involved in the original cross on which Jesus died.

But if you had that tiny piece of jewelry on your neck back in time two thousand years ago in Israel or any Roman territories, the people around you might look at you with very strange expressions on their faces. Because back then, the cross was not a symbol of faith but of failure, not of morality but of lawlessness, not of respect but of unspeakable shame.

Back then, the cross was not a polished jewelry, rather it was a mere tool for execution of prisoners. The execution on the cross was done outside of the city, overlooking the garbage dumps of the city; made of rough-cut timbers and iron spikes. The cross has a synonym with the French Guillotine, hangman’s rope, and now electrical chair or lethal injection table.

For Jesus who had no room in the inn at His birth, and He had nowhere to lay His head during His earthly ministry, but now the cross was a final stop of rest.

A. SCRIPTURAL PREDICTION

This final step of Jesus’ earthly ministry was not an accident, nor a mishap. It was a part of His Master Plan to save condemned human kind from eternal damnation and it was prophesied throughout the OT. Written centuries before Christ, several passages in the OT clearly prophesy the Messiah’s Crucifixion.

Psalm 22:12-18 Many bulls have surrounded Me; Strong bulls of Bashan have encircled Me. 13 They gape at Me with their mouths, Like a raging and roaring lion. 14 I am poured out like water, And all My bones are out of joint; My heart is like wax; It has melted within Me. 15 My strength is dried up like a potsherd, And My tongue clings to My jaws; You have brought Me to the dust of death. 16 For dogs have surrounded Me; The congregation of the wicked has enclosed Me. They pierced My hands and My feet; 17 I can count all My bones. They look and stare at Me. 18 They divide My garments among them, And for My clothing they cast lots.

Another prophetic text is Isaiah 53. It describes the misery, torture, pain of God’s Servant and even mentions about being crucified with sinners.

B. THE SAVIOR’S DEATH MARCH

John 19:17-18 And He, bearing His cross, went out to a place called the Place of a Skull, which is called in Hebrew, Golgotha, 18 where they crucified Him, and two others with Him, one on either side, and Jesus in the center.

Regarding crucifixion, Roman philosopher Cicero said, “It was the most cruel and shameful of all punishments. Let it never come near the body of a Roman citizen; nay, not even near his thoughts or eyes or ears.”

Crucifixion probably had its origin among the Persians and Phoenicians, but it was the Romans who perfected the use of it. No Roman citizen could be crucified, though

there were exceptions. This mode of capital punishment was reserved for the worst kind of criminals, particularly those who promoted insurrection. Today, we think of the cross as a symbol of glory and victory; but in Pilate's day, the cross stood for the lowest kind of rejection, shame, and suffering. It was Jesus who made the difference.

It was customary for the criminal to carry his own crossbeam which normally weighed around 75 to 100 lbs., not the entire cross because the vertical beam was already on the ground at the execution site. But according to other Gospels, Jesus was relieved by Simon of Cyrene whom the Roman soldiers compelled to carry the crossbeam for Christ. I wouldn't doubt that Jesus was wasted from no sleep, no food, no water, beating and the scourging.

C. PILATE GETS TO HAVE THE LAST WORD

John 19:19-22 Now Pilate wrote a title and put it on the cross. And the writing was: JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS. 20 Then many of the Jews read this title, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin. 21 Therefore the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews,' but, 'He said, "I am the King of the Jews.'"" 22 Pilate answered, "What I have written, I have written."

A shrewd politician like Pilate understood the reason why the Jewish religious rulers hated Jesus so much – envy. Pilate wanted to have the last word in against them. He knew that his placard would insult and embarrass them, and that is exactly what he wanted.

With so much changes in topography around Jerusalem since A.D. 70 when emperor Titus and his Roman military destroyed the city, it is impossible to determine the exact location of Golgotha or the Lord's route to the cross. If you go to Israel, you will be shown both the Church of the Holy Sepulcher and "Gordon's Calvary" near the Garden Tomb.

The location of the site "Gordon's Calvary" would have made executions carried out there a highly visible sight, to people using the main road leading north from the city. In addition to that, the presence of the skull-feature on the rock would have added to the deterrent effect.

The Hebrew word 'Golgotha' means "skull". "Calvary" is the Latin version. So you can call our church name "Skull Church." Wow, it sounds like a church for a bunch of bikers or weekend Hell's Angels wannabes.

Remember, by now, Jerusalem was packed with the pilgrims who came for the Passover. Everyone who was coming through the north gate would see the sight of the crucifixion. Rome had its way to communicate its messages to the people in that land: "You mess with Rome, this is what your future will be."

D. FULFILLING EVERY LITTLE DETAIL OF THE PROPHECIES

John 19:23-24 Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took His garments and made four parts, to each soldier a part, and also the tunic. Now the tunic was without seam, woven from the top in one piece. 24 They said therefore among themselves, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be," that the Scripture might be fulfilled which says: "They divided My garments among them, And for My clothing they cast lots." Therefore the soldiers did these things.

At most Roman executions, a centurion would be assigned with four soldiers to carry on their execution details. But in Jesus' case, since He was so well known, I wouldn't doubt that there were more guards assigned. It was the privilege of the soldiers to take whatever personal belongings the dying criminals once had. The four soldiers each took a piece of clothing, and then they gambled for the seamless robe. This fulfilled Psalm 22:18 which we read at the beginning of our study.

John does not record it, but the other Gospel writers tell us that some of the people passing by reviled Jesus, no doubt at the instigation of the chief priests and scribes. When you read Psalm 22, you see how David used the image of animals to describe the people who persecuted our Lord.

Listen, when people reject their Lord, they become like animals. Actually, I just insulted animals by saying that. Animals know who God is. When people reject their Lord, regardless of their intelligence and education they become worse than animals.

E. BE HOLD YOUR MOTHER

John 19:25-27 Now there stood by the cross of Jesus His mother, and His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. 26 When Jesus therefore saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing by, He said to His mother, "Woman, behold your son!" 27 Then He said to the disciple, "Behold your mother!" And from that hour that disciple took her to his own home.

A group of women, along with the Apostle John, stood near the cross. It took courage to stand there in the midst of such hatred and ridicule against the One whom they loved, but their being there must have encouraged our Lord.

The first time we meet Jesus' mother Mary in the Gospel of John, she was attending a wedding in John 2. Now she was preparing for a burial. The hour had come! She was experiencing "the sword would pierce through her own soul" that had been predicted by Simeon in the temple years before.

Jesus' mama Mary's silence was significant. Because if anyone could have rescued Jesus, it was His mother. All she had to do was lie that His claims were false so that she could save His life. But she said nothing! What a testimony to the deity of Christ!

By the way, don't think that Jesus was being rude to Mary by calling her "Woman," because it means "Ma'am." It is another word that was lost in translation

F. IT IS FINISHED!

John 19:28-30 After this, Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, "I thirst!" 29 Now a vessel full of sour wine was sitting there; and they filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on hyssop, and put it to His mouth. 30 So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, "It is finished!" And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit.

Please don't think that Jesus was hanging around on the cross, shooting the breeze with His mama. He was on the cross from 9 am till 3 pm. Each breath gave horrible pain to Him

When the crossbeam was set firmly on the vertical beam, Jesus would be helplessly suspended in the air. To take a breath in, Jesus had to push His torn back upward against the rough surface of the vertical beam. I cannot even imagine how painful

that would be. But it gets worse. Remember? Jesus was not sitting or standing on a platform. The Roman soldiers nailed His feet on the vertical beam. That means while Jesus was pushing Himself up to breathe, He was putting His entire weight on His nailed feet. Because He was getting tired, losing strength and inexpressible pain, He had to pull Himself up with His stretched arms that were nailed on the crossbeam through His wrists. Finally, He took a breath and His body collapsed because of the sheer excruciating white hot pain throughout His body. He repeated this breathing process until He no longer could do it.

The people who were crucified on the cross die from exposure, exhaustion, and suffocation. To them, death came painfully slow and publically humiliating.

While our Lord Jesus was on the cross, He made seven statements which are known as "the Seven Words from the Cross."

1) He prayed for those who crucified Him

Luke 23:34 "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do."

2) He gave assurance to the believing thief

Luke 23:43 "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise."

3) He took care of His mother

John 19:26-27 "Woman, behold your son!" 27 "Behold your mother!"

4) The central word had to do with His relationship to the Father.

Matthew 27:46 "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" that is, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"

5) He mentioned about His thirst.

John 19:28 "I thirst!"

6) He pronounced the end of His earthly ministry.

John 19:30 "It is finished!"

7) He surrendered His Spirit to the Father.

Luke 23:46 "Father, 'into Your hands I commit My spirit.'"

The drink of vinegar did not fully quench His thirst, but it did enable Him to utter that shout of triumph, in a loud voice, "It is finished!" In the Greek text, it is "tetelestai".

The word 'tetelestai' is unfamiliar to us, but it was used by various people in everyday life in those days. A servant would use it when reporting to his or her master after one's work is finished. When a priest examined an animal sacrifice and found it faultless, this word would apply. Jesus, of course, is the perfect Lamb of God, without spot or blemish of sin. When an artist completed a picture, or a writer a manuscript, he or she might say, "It is finished!" The death of Jesus on the cross "completes the picture" that God had been painting, the story that He had been writing, for centuries. Because of the cross, we understand the ceremonies and prophecies in the Old Testament.

Perhaps the most meaningful definition of 'tetelestai' was that used by the merchants: "The debt is paid in full!" When He gave Himself on the cross, Jesus fully met the righteous demands of a holy law; He paid our debt in full. None of the OT sacrifices could take away sins; their blood only covered sin. But the Lamb of God shed His blood, and that blood can take away the sins of the world.

What was made an end of? Jesus ended our sins and the guilt that accompanies them. What was paid? He paid the price of our redemption with His perfect atoning sacrifice. What was performed? Christ performed the righteous requirements of the

law. What was accomplished? He accomplished the work that the Father gave Him to fulfill.

Jesus Christ finished His work on the cross for you and for me. That was His purpose, His mission. Now our purpose, our mission is to believe in Him.

G. APPLICATIONS

- 1) Jesus came to pay a debt He did not owe, because we owe a debt we could not pay.
- 2) Faith in Jesus Christ is not a passive static thing that we get automatically, rather it is a moving dynamic life. We need to keep on believing in Him.
- 3) At the cross, Jesus fulfilled the law of God the Father with His own sacrifice, and dispensed God's grace to those who believe in Him through His death.