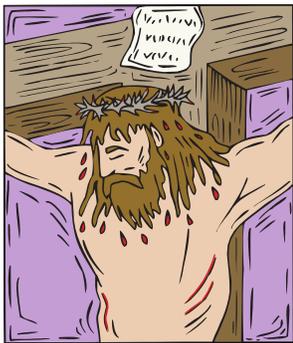




The Crucifixion

FAMILIES IN TRUTH

Matthew 27:27-44; Mark 15:16-32; Luke 23:26-43; John 19:16-27



Through the prophets, God had promised that one day, He would send a Savior to take away the sins of the world. Jesus was that Savior - the holy, perfect Son of God. Even though Jesus was innocent, He willingly suffered for those who were guilty.

Day #1: Wearing the Thorns

There is no sweeter smell than that of a rose in full bloom. Roses are beautiful to look as well as lovely to smell. What is the only trouble with a rose? The thorns! They are sharp and often hidden. Though we enjoy the rose, the prick of a thorn seems to ruin this perfect flower. Today we will look a little closer at the thorns.

Pilate was very uncomfortable handing Jesus over to be crucified. Pilate pleaded with the crowd. He said that Jesus had done nothing wrong. After questioning Him, Pilate had Jesus whipped. Perhaps Pilate thought this would satisfy the crowd. The soldiers not only hurt Jesus, but they also made fun of Him.

+ *The soldiers twisted thorns together to make a crown. They put it on Jesus' head. Then they put a purple robe on Him. They went up to Him again and again. They kept saying, "We honor You, King of the Jews!" And they hit Him in the face. - John 19:2-3*

This is a heart-breaking scene. The soldiers beat Jesus without mercy, and even spit on Him (Matthew 27:30). Then, sarcastically, they bowed down to Him and called Him King. They made a crown out of thorny vines and placed it on His head. This crown of thorns held more meaning than they knew.

In the beginning, thorns were the consequence of Adam's sin. Once they sinned, Adam and Eve could no longer live in a perfect garden. God told Adam, "I will produce thorns and thistles for you." (Genesis 3:18) Thorns are a symbol for sin (Ezekiel 28:24). Just like Adam, every one of us has chosen to sin; we have each caused thorns in our lives (Romans 5:12). But when Jesus went to the cross, God took all of our sins and placed them on Jesus. He wore our sins, our thorns.

All of us, like sheep, have strayed away. We have left God's paths to follow our own. Yet the Lord laid on Him the sins of us all. - Isaiah 53:6 NLT

***** Close your eyes and imagine the crown of thorns that the soldiers made for Jesus. Imagine that those thorns represent the sins you have committed. Some are hidden, and some are in plain view, but they all cause great pain. Now picture the soldiers placing that crown on the perfect head of Jesus. He, Himself, had never sinned. But on that day, He chose

Day #1 continued:

to accept the guilt of your sin for you. Will you accept what He has done for you? If you have put your trust in Him, pray right now, thanking Him for what He has done for you.

Day #2: The Joy Ahead

Over and over, Pilate tried to set Jesus free, but the crowd would not stop shouting for Jesus to be killed.

+ *Pilate saw that he wasn't getting anywhere. Instead, the crowd was starting to get angry. So he took water and washed his hands in front of them. "I am not guilty of this man's death," he said. "You are accountable for that!"*

All the people answered, "We and our children will accept the guilt for His death!" Pilate let Barabbas go free. But he had Jesus whipped. Then he handed Him over to be nailed to a cross. - Matthew 27:24-26

The words of the people must have stung the ears of Jesus. He was hated and despised by the ones He had come to save. Reread the crowd's response to Pilate. How right they were! They and their children were guilty for Jesus' death, but not in the way they thought. They were guilty because they were sinners. They were separated from God because of their sin (Isaiah 59:2), and Jesus **chose** to die to take away their sin, to bring them back to God (1 Peter 2:24).

Let us keep looking to Jesus. He is the author of faith. He also makes it perfect. He paid no attention to the shame of the cross. He suffered there because of the joy he was looking forward to. Then He sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. - Hebrews 12:2

Being hung on a cross was called crucifixion. It was the way the Romans punished criminals back in Jesus' time. Dying on a cross was a horrible and painful way to die. It was shameful, because the criminal was hung up for everyone in the town to see.

What joy was Jesus was looking forward to that could possibly be worth the suffering of wearing our sin? He was going to bring lost people back into a relationship with God! This was the reason Jesus came. His deep love for us, and His desire to glorify God, was the joy that motivated Him.

***** Hebrews 12:2 (above) begins with a command for us. What is it? How can we keep looking to Jesus? (Abide with Him, remain with Him, think about His word, talk to Him, explore His creation, enjoy His presence) When we look to Jesus, we will be motivated by the same JOY that He looked forward to.

Day #3: In My Place

History tells us that a person who was going to be crucified was forced to carry the wood for his own cross to the place

Day #3 continued:

of execution. After all of His beatings, Jesus must have been too weak to carry the heavy beams. The Roman soldiers forced a man who was passing by to carry Jesus' cross. His name was Simon (Mark 15:21). They came to a place called Golgotha, which means the Place of the Skull (Matthew 27:33). There, they nailed Jesus' hands and feet to the cross and raised it up high (John 20:25).

The soldiers offered Jesus wine mixed with myrrh. This mixture was used to help relieve some of the pain. But Jesus did not take it (Mark 15:22). Pilate ordered that a sign be placed on the cross above Jesus. It read, "Jesus of Nazareth, The King of the Jews." (John 19:19) The chief priests complained to Pilate that Jesus was not the King of the Jews. But Pilate refused to change it.

The people who passed by Jesus mocked Him and called out insults at Him (Matthew 27:39). The chief priests and religious leaders made fun of Him also.

+ *"He saved others," they said. "But He can't save Himself! He's the King of Israel! Let Him come down now from the cross! Then we will believe in Him. He trusts in God. Let God rescue Him now if He wants Him. He's the One who said, 'I am the Son of God.' "* - Matthew 27:42-43

In sharp contrast, the sobs of His mother Mary could be heard at the foot of the cross. Among the sounds of all these voices, remarkably, the voices of the disciples were absent. As far as we know, only one disciple was in plain sight at the cross. The others had either stayed far away, or they were hiding in the crowd.

Even so, none of this was a surprise to Jesus. He knew every single thing that was going to happen to Him. He knew which voices would shout, "Crucify Him!" He knew how many times the whip would strike His back, and He knew how many nails would pierce His perfect skin. Yet He chose to allow it all. He did this because He was the only One who could take your place.

***** Place your name in the verse below:

Christ died for sins once and for all time. The One who did what is right died for _____ who didn't do right. He died to bring me to God. His body was put to death. But the Holy Spirit brought Him back to life. - 1 Peter 3:18 (modified)

Day #4: Forgive Them

As the soldiers hung Jesus on the cross, Jesus prayed these amazing words:

+ *Jesus said, "Father, forgive them. They don't know what they are doing." The soldiers divided up His clothes by casting lots. - Luke 23:34*

The first sentence Jesus spoke from the cross was a prayer for the men who had beaten Him and nailed Him to this cross. Even while the soldiers were gambling for His clothing, Jesus prayed for their forgiveness. By saying they didn't know what they were doing, Jesus meant that the soldiers did not understand the full impact of what they were doing. They thought they were just doing the same job they did day after day - hanging criminals. They did not know that they were crucifying the very Son of God. They did not realize who Jesus was until after His death (Matthew 27:54).

Day #4 continued:

In our human mind, it is almost impossible to imagine Jesus praying for the people who tortured Him. But we must remember, forgiveness was the very reason Jesus came and the reason that He willingly died on the cross (John 12:47).

***** As believers, we are called to follow Jesus' incredible example (John 13:15). We see that Jesus forgave those who physically tortured Him, while His wounds were still stinging. If He (who was perfect) has forgiven you, how can you (who are imperfect) withhold forgiveness from anyone in your life? Jesus commanded us to forgive one another (John 13:14). Is there anyone who you need to forgive? Pray that God will help you let go of your bitterness toward that person. Ask God to give you the ability to forgive him or her, just as you have been forgiven.

As a physical reminder, in just a few words, write down the situation that you have been unable to forgive. Pray over the situation, then show that you are giving up your "right" to remain angry by tearing up the paper.

Day #5: Who Do You Say I Am?

The Bible tells us that Jesus was not the only man sentenced to die that day. There were two criminals who were crucified with Him, one on either side of Jesus (Luke 23:33). This was foretold in the Old Testament (Isaiah 53:12). One of the criminals believed that Jesus was who He claimed to be, but the other criminal did not.

+ *One of the criminals hanging there made fun of Jesus. He said, "Aren't you the Christ? Save Yourself! Save us!"*

But the other criminal scolded him. "Don't you have any respect for God?" he said. "Remember, you are under the same sentence of death. We are being punished fairly. We are getting just what our actions call for. But this Man hasn't done anything wrong." Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when You come into Your kingdom."

Jesus answered him, "What I'm about to tell you is true. Today you will be with Me in paradise." - Luke 23:39-43

Jesus once asked His disciples, "What about you? Who do you say I am?" (Matthew 16:15) There are only two options: Jesus is God, or Jesus is not God. Jesus Himself claimed that He was God's Son (Matthew 26:63-64). He said, "The Father and I are one." (John 10:30) Jesus said He had the power to forgive sin (Mark 2:10). The Bible says that Jesus existed before the creation of the world (John 1:10). He always was, and He always will be (1 John 5:20b).

The truth that Jesus is God is made clear to people by the power of the Holy Spirit (John 6:7-12). This truth fulfills all of the prophecies of the Old Testament, and proves God's grace and mercy.

***** Just like the two criminals that hung beside Jesus, each person must decide who Jesus is. While Jesus was on earth, many people believed He was God, but many people did not. Some people followed Him, but some people rejected Him. Some loved Him. Others hated Him.

If you believe Jesus is the sinless Son of God and believe He died to take away your sins, you are welcomed into the Kingdom of God. If you are not sure, ask God to lead you into the truth about Jesus (Matthew 16:16-17).