

Snapshots of the Crucifixion

Selected Scriptures

Pastor Jeremy Cagle, April 14, 2017

We are here to celebrate Good Friday. I want to say a big “thank you” to everyone who worked so hard to put this together. I want to thank Brian Giesbrecht of Mission Bible Church for the work he put into this. I believe it was his idea to bring the churches together. I want to thank Wes Dyck and the people of Prairie Chapel for leading us in music and allowing us to meet in their facility.

I think the best way to start out is like this. The story is told that as Abraham Lincoln’s body was being transported from Washington DC to Illinois, a slave woman approached the train holding a baby in her arms. As it passed by carrying the president’s body, she held her baby up to it and said, “Take a long look honey, that man died for you.”

I don't have to tell you that Good Friday is the time when we celebrate Jesus' death, when we celebrate the Man who died for you. I looked it up this week and there are some 30 different holidays on the Christian calendar, and as far as I know this is the only one that celebrates Jesus death specifically. Christmas celebrates His birth, Easter celebrates His resurrection, but Good Friday celebrates His death. You could look at it this way, Good Friday is the only holiday that calls itself “good” and celebrates a death. I can't think of any other holiday, secular or religious, that does that. It's pretty unusual.

Usually death is a bad thing, but here it is good. And the reason is because of what this death accomplished. It started a new covenant. It started a new way to approach God. Before Jesus came, people approached God through sacrifice. It has been said that a Jew could never utter the words “it is finished.” He could never say that. He could never say “It is enough. I've done all I can. Now it's over.” Every time he sinned, he had to go back to the temple; back to the altar and offer one more bull, one more ram, one more goat to God. You would think that they would eventually run out of animals in Israel. So many of them had to be sacrificed. But Jesus did away with all of that. He was the final sacrifice. He was the final penalty for sin. He was the one who said “It is finished.” He started a new covenant. He also started a religion of Grace. That's another way to look at this. He did away with the need to do works to get to God.

The farmer was once asked “What is the hardest thing about milking cows?” He said, “They never stay milked. The job is never done.” It is the same way with trying to do good works to get to God. There's always more work to do. There's always one more prayer to pray, one more service to attend, one more neighbour to help out. George Whitfield said, “Trying to get to heaven with works is like trying to climb to the sun on a rope made of sand. You can never get there.”

Now to be fair, the Old Testament was also a religion of grace. The Jews weren't saved by good works either. We would all agree that they put a heavy emphasis on them. They put a heavy emphasis on the physical. Jesus did away with that. His cross took care of it all. John 6:29 says, “The work of God is this: to believe in the One He has sent.”

Finally, it did away with death. That's one more thing his death accomplished. It started a new covenant. It emphasized a religion of grace. And it did away with death once and for all.

According to the Institute for Mental Health, one of the greatest fears in the United States is the fear of death. 68% of the population have it. It is called necrophobia, the fear of dying. When you look at the statistics in Canada, it's the same. The Globe and Mail website recently published an article called "Why are Canadians afraid of death?" where it was discovered that 70% of Canadians have no living will. Fewer than 47% have someone legally designated to make decisions for them when they are dying. Why? Because they are afraid of it. Why? They don't want to talk about it. It makes them uncomfortable. It makes them nervous.

Listen friends, you don't have to be that way. You don't have to be afraid of death. You don't have to be afraid to talk about it. Jesus has defeated it for you. He has put it to death on the cross. Gregory of Nanzianzus in the 4th Century put it like this:

Jesus began his ministry by being hungry, yet he is the Bread of Life. Jesus ended his Earthly Ministry by being thirsty, yet he is the Living Water. Jesus was weary, yet he is our rest. Jesus paid tribute, yet he is the King. Jesus was brought as a lamb to the slaughter, yet he is the Good Shepherd. Jesus died, yet by his death he destroyed the power of death.

That is what I want to talk to you about this morning. How did Jesus destroy the power of death? How does he put death to death? Maybe another way to ask this is, what did it look like? If you were sitting at the cross at Calvary in the first century, and you saw Jesus die, what would you see? What would you witness? If you were sitting in the garden watching Him pray, or sitting at His trial watching Him be accused, what would you hear? What would you experience?

We just watched a video that talked about that a little bit, but this morning I want to answer that by giving you some snapshots of the crucifixion. I am calling these "snapshots" because they will be pretty quick. We won't spend too much time on each one. We'll just take a quick snapshot and move on.

What was the cross like? This is what we celebrate on Good Friday. We celebrate the cross. We celebrate His death. What was it like? What did He go through to give us a new covenant? What did He go through to give us grace?

A couple of things. The first one is this: the betrayal of Judas. The crucifixion essentially begins with Judas stabbing Jesus in the back. Turn in your Bibles to Luke 22. I don't know if you have ever been betrayed before, but it's miserable, isn't it? It never leaves you. I don't think there is anything worse than being betrayed and getting abandoned by a friend. The crucifixion starts with Jesus getting abandoned by a friend.

Several events took place to set Jesus against the Jews. In Matthew 12, Jesus healed a man on the Sabbath. It made the Pharisees so mad that it says they wanted to kill Him. Verse 14 says that as a result of the miracle "the Pharisees went out and conspired against Him as to how they might

destroy Him.” In Mark 11 Jesus cleansed the temple and the same thing happens again. It infuriates the Pharisees and the Jews in general, and they threaten to kill Him. In John 10 Jesus said that “I and the Father are one” and in John 8:58 Jesus said, “before Abraham was ..., I Am.” Again, they pick up stones to stone Him. So over and over again in His ministry Jesus made the Jews angry. Over and over again He made them mad - murderously mad. Mad enough to kill someone. So that by the time you get to the cross, it was inevitable. If Jesus stayed in Israel, he was going to die.

God allowed Satan to enter Judas, and Judas betrayed our Lord. According to Luke 22:2, the chief priests and the teachers of the law bargained with Judas for Jesus arrest. Verse five says that they gave him money. They paid him. Luke doesn't tell us how much they paid him, but Matthew the tax collector does. In Matthew 26 we read, “Then one of the twelve, named Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, ‘What are you willing to give me to betray Him to you?’ And they weighed out thirty pieces of silver to him.”

Why 30 pieces of silver? What's the significance of that? According to the Old Testament, 30 pieces of silver was the price of a slave. Exodus 21:32 reads, “If an ox gores a male or female slave the owner shall give his or her master 30 shekels of silver.” Judas betrayed Jesus for the price of a slave. Betrayed for the price of the lowest person imaginable. We don't read anywhere that he tried to raise that price. We don't read anywhere that he argued with them about it. They said 30 pieces of silver, and he said okay. That was it. The deal was done.

Luke 22:6 says that after this agreement Judas watched for an opportunity to hand Jesus over. And he gets that opportunity in verses 47-54. Luke 22:47-54:

While He was still speaking, behold, a crowd came, and the one called Judas, one of the twelve, was preceding them; and he approached Jesus to kiss Him. 48 But Jesus said to him, “Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?” 49 When those who were around Him saw what was going to happen, they said, “Lord, shall we strike with the sword?” 50 And one of them struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his right ear. 51 But Jesus answered and said, “Stop! No more of this.” And He touched his ear and healed him. 52 Then Jesus said to the chief priests and officers of the temple and elders who had come against Him, “Have you come out with swords and clubs as you would against a robber? 53 While I was with you daily in the temple, you did not lay hands on Me; but this hour and the power of darkness are yours.” 54 Having arrested Him, they led Him away and brought Him to the house of the high priest; but Peter was following at a distance.

Verse 47 says that a crowd came. Matthew and Mark say that it was a great multitude with swords and clubs. John says it was a cohort. The term “cohort” is helpful because it referred to a band of Roman soldiers. According to one source this could have been as many as 200 to 600 armed guards against 12 fishermen. 600 against 12. That's disgusting. That's embarrassing. Those odds are ridiculous. Judas couldn't possibly need this many people. This shows Peter's bravery, by the way. There's no way he could win this fight. He didn't stand a chance, but he tried anyway. It says that he struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his right ear. He wasn't

aiming for his ear by the way. Nobody aims for the ear. He was aiming for his neck; he wanted to cut off his head. The slave ducked and he got his ear instead.

The point is that this is a terrible betrayal. Judas knew that there was no way 12 disciples could fight this many soldiers. You could add to this that it was in the dead of night. So it was a total surprise. Verse 47 says that he also greeted Jesus with a kiss, which was a sign of intimate friendship. You don't kiss just anybody. You only kissed your closest friends. In the other Gospels, he calls Him Rabbi as a sign of respect. He was mocking Jesus as he did this. He was making fun of Him. This is disgusting; it is demonic to see the least. He sold Jesus for the price of a slave. He kisses Him on the cheek. He calls Him teacher. He brings 600 armed guards to arrest Him in the middle of the night.

Before we get to the physical side of suffering, I think it is helpful to point out his emotional state at this point. Jesus was no robot. He had emotions. He felt the same things that we feel. He experienced many of the same things that we experience. This was backstabbing on a professional level. We don't know when Judas started following the Lord, but we know that Jesus was aware of this betrayal long before it happened. John 6 says,

66 As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore. 67 So Jesus said to the twelve, "You do not want to go away also, do you?" 68 Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life." ... 70 Jesus answered them, "Did I Myself not choose you, the twelve, and yet one of you is a devil?" 71 Now He meant Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the twelve, was going to betray Him.

Jesus knew that Judas would betray Him. He knew about it long before it happened. But He allowed it anyway. This means that Judas would have heard more of Jesus' teaching than anyone else. He would have seen more of Jesus' miracles than anyone. He would have heard more of the parables. Seeing more of Jesus' life, and yet he still did this. It was diabolical. It was satanic in every sense of the word; cold-hearted, underhanded, a cowardly betrayal. This must have hurt Jesus more than anything. This must have broken His heart long before it broke His body.

That leads to the next snapshot of the Crucifixion. We start with the betrayal of Judas, and then we go to the Garden of Gethsemane. We are going to backtrack just a little bit here. If you look back up to Luke 22:39-44 it says:

And He came out and proceeded as was His custom to the Mount of Olives; and the disciples also followed Him. 40 When He arrived at the place, He said to them, "Pray that you may not enter into temptation." 41 And He withdrew from them about a stone's throw, and He knelt down and began to pray, 42 saying, "Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done." 43 Now an angel from heaven appeared to Him, strengthening Him. 44 And being in agony He was praying very fervently; and His sweat became like drops of blood, falling down upon the ground.

The Mount of Olives was a hill located just across from the Jerusalem Temple. From it you could see all of Jerusalem. The whole city just kind of sprawls out in front of you. At the bottom of the hill lies a garden called the Garden of Gethsemane. The Gospel of Matthew talks about that here. It is a garden of olive trees. It's a very private place. A good place for prayer. Luke 22 says that as Jesus took His disciples into the garden to pray, He went off by Himself, and His sweat became like drops of blood falling upon the ground. That sounds kind of strange doesn't it? His sweat became like drops of blood. We usually talk about sweating bullets, but never sweating blood. But here is Jesus is doing that. What's going on?

In 1998 Lee Strobel published a book entitled *The Case for Christ*, in which he interviewed several experts to ask them about the cross. One of them was a medical expert named Alexander Metherell. He was a research professor from the University of California who also consulted regularly with the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute. He asked him about this phenomenon of sweating blood. Here is what he said.

“It began after the Last Supper. Jesus went with his disciples to the Mount of Olives, specifically to the garden of Gethsemane. And there, if you remember, He prayed all night. Now during that process, He was anticipating the coming events of the next day. Since He knew the amount of suffering He was going to endure, He was quite naturally experiencing a great deal of psychological stress.”

I raised my hand to stop him. “Whoa - here is where the skeptics have a field day.” I told him. “The Gospels tell us that He began to sweat blood at this point. Now come on, isn't that just a product of some overactive imaginations? Doesn't that call into question the accuracy of the Gospel writers?”

Unfazed, Metherell shook his head. “Not at all,” he replied. “This is a known medical condition called hematidrosis. It's not very common, but it is associated with a high degree of psychological stress. What happens is that severe anxiety causes the release of chemicals that break down the capillaries in the sweat glands. As a result, there's a small amount of bleeding into these glands, and the sweat comes out tinged with blood. We're not talking about a lot of blood; it's just a very, very small amount.”

Though a bit chastened, I pressed on. “Did this have any other effect on the body?”

“What this did was set up the skin to be extremely fragile so that when Jesus was flogged by the Roman soldier the next day, his skin would be very, very sensitive.”

I will stop there. He says that the process of sweating blood, hematidrosis, would have made Jesus' skin very, very sensitive. This means that when He was beaten and whipped and crucified, His body would have been unusually soft. As He was thinking of what lay before Him, of carrying the world's sins, of being the Lamb of God, He literally sweat blood. It made the rest of what He went through extremely painful. You guys know the answer to this; stress has an effect

on the body, doesn't it? After a trip to the funeral home or the hospital, you are worn out, aren't you? You are tired. That's what Jesus is experiencing here. The stress of what He is about to do is destroying His body.

Just a recap of the past week in His life: Jesus has entered Jerusalem triumphantly to the sounds of "Hosanna in the highest, blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord." - quite an exciting time for Him, and very encouraging. A lot of people were patting Him on the back. Then He cleansed the temple, which made all of that stop, because it offended the Pharisees again. Like I just said, the Pharisees hated Him for that. The hatred continued as He debated with some of them - quite adamantly, I might add, quite forcefully. He gave the Parable of the Vineyard, the Parable of the Fig Tree. He told of the destruction of Jerusalem with a tear in His eye. He literally wept over the city. Now He has had the Last Supper. He has said goodbye to His friends. He is waiting to be betrayed, all in one week, all in a seven-day window of time. So Jesus is exhausted. The Son of God is literally worn out. He is under so much stress at the thought of what is about to happen that He literally sweats blood. It makes His skin extra soft and tender.

Which leads to a third snapshot of the Crucifixion: the trial before Pilate and the Jews. I just want to warn you that some of this might be a little gory and a little raw, but please know I'm not trying to gross you out. I just want you to see what Jesus saw as He went through this. The Gospels say that Jesus was tried by the Jews first, and later by the Romans. He was arrested late in the night when Pontius Pilate the Roman governor was asleep, and held until morning for trial.

There was a fortress on the north end of Jerusalem Temple grounds called the Fortress Antonia, where He was held. While He was there, Luke 22:63-65 tells us, "The temple guard began to mock Him and beat Him." Now let me just point out on the front end here that temple guards were not supposed to beat the prisoner who was on trial. That was illegal. It was an infringement on the prisoner's rights. The Jews had laws to protect prisoners back then, and this violated all of them. Let me also point out that they were not supposed to try someone at night. There were laws against that sort of thing, for obvious reasons. But even more than that, remember that Jesus skin was soft because He had just sweat blood. Now He's experiencing this. This crowd of 600 men have arrested Him, and they are beating Him mercilessly, endlessly, after all He went through in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Just to go through this part quickly, in the Gospel of Luke, verses 66-71 describe Jesus' trial before the Jews. As you can imagine, He never has a chance. They pronounced Him guilty before proven innocent. According to Matthew 26, the soldiers spit in His face and struck Him with their fists. Luke says that they mocked Him and blindfolded Him and struck Him, saying "prophesy and tell us who hit you." Then they brought Him before the Romans. Luke 23 tells us what happens when Pilate and Herod get involved. It's pretty much the same thing. Verses 8 through 12 describe how Herod puts the royal robe on Him and mocks Him again, which will be significant in a minute. If you look down in verses 13-16 of chapter 23 it says:

Pilate summoned the chief priests and the rulers and the people, 14 and said to them, "You brought this man to me as one who incites the people to rebellion, and behold, having examined Him before you, I have found no guilt in this man

regarding the charges which you make against Him. 15 No, nor has Herod, for he sent Him back to us; and behold, nothing deserving death has been done by Him. 16 Therefore I will punish Him and release Him.”

That sounds kind of funny doesn't it? “I find no charge against this man, but I will punish Him anyway.” You would think that if you found no charge against Him, that you wouldn't punish Him, but that's not how Roman law worked. It was “punish now and ask questions later.”

Luke doesn't say exactly how Pilate punished Jesus here, but Matthew says that he scourged Him or flogged Him. Just to give you a picture of what that looked like, let me read another quote to you. This one is also from Alexander Metherell, the heart, lung, and blood doctor.

“Tell me,” Strobel said, “what was the flogging like?”

Metherell's eyes never left me. “Roman floggings were known to be terribly brutal. They usually consisted of thirty-nine lashes but frequently were a lot more than that, depending on the mood of the soldier applying the blows.

“The soldier would use a whip of braided leather thongs with metal balls woven into them. When the whip would strike the flesh, these balls would cause deep bruises or contusions which would break open with further blows. And the whip had pieces of sharp bone as well which would cut the flesh severely.

“The back would be so shredded that part of the spine was sometimes exposed by the deep, deep cuts. The whipping would have gone all the way from the shoulders down to the back of the buttocks and the back of the legs. It was just terrible.”

Metherell paused. “Go on,” I said.

“One physician who has studied Roman beatings said, ‘As the floggings continued, the lacerations would tear into the underlying skeletal muscles and produce quivering ribbons of bleeding flesh.’ A third-century historian by the name of Eusebius described a flogging by saying, ‘The sufferer's veins were laid bare, and the very muscles, sinews, and bowels of the victim are open to exposure.’

“We know that many people would die from this kind of beating even before they could be crucified. At the least, the victim would experience tremendous pain and go into hypovolemic shock.”

Metherell had thrown in a medical term I didn't know. “What does hypovolemic shock mean?” I asked.

“*Hypo* means low, *vol* refers to volume, and *emic* means blood, so hypovolemic shock means the person is suffering the effects of losing a large amount of blood.”

the doctor explained. "This does 4 things: first, the heart races to try to pump blood that isn't there, second, the blood pressure drops, causing fainting or collapse. The kidneys stop producing urine to maintain what volume is left, and fourth, the person becomes very thirsty as the body craves fluids to replace the lost blood volume."

So, before Jesus is even put on a cross, He is beaten within an inch of His life, to the point that His body is put into hypovolemic shock. If you remember, later on, Pilate is surprised that Jesus died so soon. He dies within a couple of hours. This is because the Romans flogged and whipped Him severely.

Just to go back to the sequence of events and show you how terrible this was, Matthew 27 says that after the flogging they put the royal robes back on Jesus. If you think about that, when your skin gets cut, it scabs up, right? It starts to heal by forming a scab. Jesus' back was whipped to the point that you could have seen his skeleton, and now they're putting a robe on Him, forcing the wounds to scab to the robe and stick to it. When they took the robe off all the scabs would have come off with it. This was absolutely horrible. It was extremely, extremely painful for Him. I'm not trying to be gross here but I'm just trying to point out that the crucifixion was only part of His suffering. It was the biggest part, it was the part that eventually killed Him, but all of this stuff killed Him too.

I don't know if you have ever gone through your grandparents' house, looking at pictures on the wall, but I used to do this all the time at my grandparents' house in Jackson, Tennessee. They had a painting of Jesus on the cross hanging on the wall in their den. It was right next to some of my grandfather's World War II stuff. The painting had a Roman soldier with his sword. It had Jesus on the cross with two nails in His hands, one in His feet and a crown of thorns on His head. There's a little blood around all of that and a few scratches in his chest, and that's it. That's as bad as it gets.

But can I tell you that that is not what this looked like in the first century? Can I tell you that that is not the way Jesus died? He died in a pool of blood. He died in an act of human butchery.

It started out at night and went all the way until midday the following day, and it never ever let up. The Scriptures say that people hurled insults at Him while this happened, just like you would hurl rocks. So not only did they torture Him, but they made fun of Him.

A crown of thorns was placed upon His head - which we don't have time to talk about. All of this would be enough to kill someone. All of it would have been enough to drive you into the grave. The only thing left now is for Him to be crucified. So let's talk about that.

The fourth snapshot of the Crucifixion was at the Cross itself. His suffering occurred at the betrayal of Judas at the Garden of Gethsemane, at the trial before the Jews and Pontius Pilate, and finally, at the cross itself. Luke gives an excellent account of the crucifixion, but John give it more concisely. Let's turn to John 19 for a minute.

After His trial, Jesus started to carry the crossbeam of His cross. It was known as the patibulum and weighed around 200 pounds. The vertical beam of the cross would have been already driven into the ground somewhere outside the city, but the horizontal beam would be carried by the criminal to the place of execution. Because of His flogging, Jesus couldn't do that. He was exhausted. The other Gospels say that Simon of Cyrene did it. The Roman soldiers just grabbed him out of the crowd and forced him to carry it. After that, John 19:16-19 says,

So he then handed Him over to them to be crucified. 17 They took Jesus, therefore, and He went out, bearing His own cross, to the place called the Place of a Skull, which is called in Hebrew, Golgotha. 18 There they crucified Him, and with Him two other men, one on either side, and Jesus in between. 19 Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross. It was written, "JESUS THE NAZARENE, THE KING OF THE JEWS."

According to verse 17, Jesus carried the cross to Golgotha, the place of the skull.

When my wife and I were in Jerusalem, we asked the tour guide to show us where Jesus was crucified. He took us to a part of the city where a church now stands. It is called the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. He explained that this was originally outside the walls of the city at a stone quarry. It looked like a skull because they were digging rocks out of the hills to use them in Herod the Great's building projects. Our guide also explained that that made this area the equivalent of a first-century garbage dump. It would have been used as a place to dump your trash. Nobody crucified a man inside the city. It was too revolting. It was too gross. They did it here at the local garbage dump. What was that like? What was a crucifixion like in the first century?

It is pretty difficult for us to wrap our minds around how repulsive crucifixion was to the ancient people. After all, we have crosses on our church buildings and crosses around our necks. We sing songs about the cross. We call people to come to the cross to be saved. And rightly so. But I think a lot of that would change if criminals today were crucified on crosses. You wouldn't wear a cross around your neck today if criminals were crucified on crosses. In Jesus' day, crucifixion was about the worst possible way a man could die. It wasn't the quickest way a man could die. It took a long time to crucify a man. It wasn't the most popular way that a man could die. There were other methods that the authorities preferred. But crucifixion was the most agonizing and humiliating form of torture that the ancient people could come up with.

I won't go into all the details, but when people were crucified, it was usually done naked to humiliate the victim. They would strip him down naked. They would take all his clothes off and pin his arms and legs to the wood to keep him from doing anything to help himself. They would sometimes do that with nails, sometimes with rope. The condemned man would hang there for days, often as long as a week to prolong the pain. Eventually he would give up from sheer exhaustion or from dehydration. In the worst possible scenarios, vultures or insects would get to him.

To describe the horror of crucifixion, the Roman orator Cicero in the first century BC, writing about 100 years before Paul, said, "To bind a Roman citizen is a crime, to flog him is an

abomination, to kill him is an act of murder; to crucify him is - what? There is no fitting word that can possibly describe so horrible a deed."

Cicero, writing around the time of Jesus, said that crucifixion was so awful that there was no word to describe so horrible a deed and that no decent Roman should ever speak of it.

It might also be worth mentioning that the oldest surviving picture we have of a cross comes from a painting on the wall of a house in Rome in the second century. On this painting, there is a man on a cross with the head of a donkey, and beneath him is another man with his hands lifted up in praise. Under that man are the words "Alexamenos worships his God." The idea of worshipping a crucified man was so stupid to ancients, that they compared it to worshipping a donkey. It was a system of torture that was designed to humiliate a man and make him die in the worst way imaginable. Listen to what Alexander Metherell says about this. This is the last time I will quote from him.

"He would have been laid down, and his hands would have been nailed in the outstretched position to the horizontal beam. This cross bar was called the patibulum, and at this stage it was separate from the vertical beam, which was permanently set in the ground."

I was having difficulty visualizing this; I needed more details. "Nailed with what?" I asked. "Nailed where?"

"The Romans used spikes that were five to seven inches long and tapered to a sharp point. They were driven through the wrists," Metherell said, pointing about an inch or two below his palm.

"Hold it," I interrupted. "I thought the nails pierced his palms. That's what all the paintings show. In fact, it's become a standard symbol representing the Crucifixion."

"Through the wrists," Metherell repeated. "This was a solid position that would lock the hand; if the nails had been driven through the palms, his weight would have caused the skin to tear and He would have fallen off the cross. So the nails went through the wrists, although this was considered part of the hand in the language of the day."

"And it's important to understand that the nail would go through the place where the median nerve runs. This is the largest nerve going out to the hand, and it would be crushed by the nail that was being pounded in."

Since I have only a rudimentary knowledge of the human anatomy, I wasn't sure what this meant. "What sort of pain would that have produced?" I asked.

"Let me put it this way," he replied. "Do you know the kind of pain you feel when you bang your elbow and hit your funny bone? That's actually another nerve,

called the ulna nerve. It's extremely painful when you accidentally hit it. Well, picture taking a pair of pliers and squeezing and crushing that nerve," he said, emphasizing the word *squeezing* as he twisted an imaginary pair of pliers. "That effect would be similar to what Jesus experienced."

I winced at the image and squirmed in my chair.

To really understand what this was like, I think we need to keep going here. I don't want to belabour the point, I just want you to see what it was like.

"The pain was absolutely unbearable," he continued. "In fact, it was literally beyond words to describe; they had to invent a new word: *excruciating*. Literally, *excruciating* means 'out of the cross.' Think of that: they needed to create a new word, because there was nothing in the language that could describe the intense anguish caused during the crucifixion.

"At this point, Jesus was hoisted as the crossbar was attached to the vertical stake, and then nails were driven through Jesus' feet. Again the nerves in His feet would have been crushed, and there would have been a similar type of pain."

Crushed and severed nerves were certainly bad enough, but I needed to know about the effect that hanging from the cross would have had on Jesus. "What stresses would this have put on his body?"

Metherell answered, "First of all, His arms would have immediately been stretched, probably about six inches in length, and both shoulders would have become dislocated - you can determine that with simple mathematical equations.

"Once a person is hanging in the vertical position, crucifixion is essentially an agonizingly slow death by asphyxiation (suffocation).

"The reason is that the stresses on the muscles and diaphragm put the chest into the inhaled position; basically, in order to exhale, the individual must push up on his feet so the tension on the muscles would be eased for a moment. In doing so, the nail would tear through the foot, eventually locking up against the tarsal bones.

"After managing to exhale, the person would then be able to relax down and take another breath in. Again he'd have to push himself up to exhale, scraping his bloodied back against the coarse wood of the cross. This would go on and on until complete exhaustion would take over, and the person wouldn't be able to push up and breathe anymore.

"As the person slows down his breathing, he goes into what is called respiratory acidosis - the carbon dioxide in the blood is dissolved as carbonic acid, causing the acidity of the blood to increase. This eventually leads to an irregular heartbeat.

In fact, with his heart beating erratically, Jesus would have known that He was at the moment of death, which is when He was able to say, ‘Lord, into your hands I commit my spirit.’ And then He died of cardiac arrest.”

In other words, His heart stopped working.

Crucifixion was horrible - absolutely horrible. Rome ruled the world in the first century, and they ruled it through torture. This was the worst form of torture they could come up with. Anything was better than being crucified. Any form of death was better than this one.

It all leads to this: why did Jesus do this? This was so painful, that it’s hard for us to wrap our minds around it. The pain lasted for hours; almost an entire day. It was so bad, that they had to invent a new word to describe it - *excruciating*, out of the cross. So why did Jesus die like this? Why not find another way to die?

Going back to what we said at the beginning, why do we celebrate this? Of all the things to celebrate, why this? Why is His death so important to us?

Let me give you a few reasons, and I will tie it off with this.

We celebrate this. Jesus’ death is so important. He had to die like this because you and I have a sin problem. Jesus did this, because we have offended a holy and righteous God. The only way to be forgiven is for Him to die like this, on a cross. I have talked with people who have said “Well, I have never killed anybody. So why would Jesus have to die for me?” “I have never done anything that bad. He didn’t have to be crucified.” He did, because your sin is this bad. He did, because you have offended God this much.

You could look at it this way. You could slap me in the face and nothing bad will happen to you. But, if you slap Justin Trudeau, the Prime Minister of Canada in the face, you will go to jail. Why? Because he has a higher office than mine. He is a greater person than me in the government of Canada.

Well my friends, God is of infinite greatness. His office is higher than the heavens are above the earth. When you sin, it makes Him furious. When you slap Him in the face, it makes Him angry. And that is why Jesus had to die on the cross. That was the only way to deal with that anger. That was the only way to deal with that hatred towards sin. You can either take all of your sin and deal with it yourself in Hell, where God’s fury is poured out forever. Or you can put it right here on the cross where God’s fury was poured out on His son, and go to heaven. Those are your two options. They are your only two.

This leads to another point. That is, Jesus did this so we wouldn’t have to die in our sins. You have a sin problem. I hope you know that. Just leave here this morning, get in your car, and I promise you that you will sin on your way home. It is inevitable. You can’t stop it. I have told our people that if you could hang an MP3 recorder around your neck all day long and hit play at the end of the day, what would it say about you? It would say that you are a sinner, right? It would say that you don’t do the right thing before God. Now let’s say that we put that same

recorder inside your head. What would that say? It would say that you are a terrible sinner. You are the chief of sinners. Can I just tell you that God has an MP3 recorder in heaven? Matthew 12 says, “But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment. 37 For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.”

You will be judged by your words. You will be judged by what you say. God remembers all of it. He records everything that comes out of your mouth. That’s why you need the cross. Without it, you would die in your sins. Without it, you would have to answer for every careless word before God.

A preacher was once praying with a young man who said, “Lord, please get rid of the cobwebs in my life.” The preacher replied, “Yes, Lord, and get rid of the spider too.” You need to get rid of the spider too. You need to get rid of your sin problem. You can only do that at the cross.

Which leads to one more point. Jesus did this so we could go to heaven. God is a holy God which means that He will not let sin into His presence. He will let no lie or careless word into heaven. So if you want to go to heaven, you have to deal with that here. If you want to go to paradise, someone has to pay for your sins now, in this life and on this earth. That is why Jesus died on the cross; to pay for your sins now, to deal with your sins here. Theologians call this substitution.

A small boy was coming home late from school and his parents warned him that if he didn’t stop, there would be consequences. He didn’t stop. He just kept coming home late. Finally, one night he came to the dinner table and there was a slice of stale bread and a cup of warm water for him. That was it. That’s all he was going to eat for dinner. After letting that sink in for a while, his dad, with a tear in his eye, quietly moved the boy’s plate over to himself and he gave him his plate full of meat and potatoes. My friends, that is what God has done for you. He has become your substitute. He has traded plates with you. He has taken your cup of warm water and your crusty old bread to Himself, and He has given you a plate full of meat and potatoes. He came to be betrayed and beaten and humiliated in your place. He came to be flogged and whipped and stressed out in your place. He came to be crucified and killed and mocked and insulted in your place, if you would simply believe in Him; if you would turn away from your sins and come to Him, begging for His forgiveness.

As the slave woman said at the beginning, “Take a long look, honey, that man died for you.” Take a long look, honey, that Man suffered for you. Take a long look, honey, that Man went to the cross for you, so you could go to heaven. You can be made right with God. Believe in Him now, and become right with God today.

Let’s pray and ask for God’s help in doing that if you never have.