

The Stages of His Suffering: The Gentle Man of Sorrows

1. Jesus predicted His suffering and death (Matthew 16:13-28)

In the Gospels we are told that Jesus when He came to Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples: “Who do the people say the Son of Man is?” They answered Jesus by saying: “Some say you are John the Baptist, others say you are Elijah. Still others say you are Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” Then Jesus asked: “And what about you?” In other words, He asked them about what was their own personal opinion about Him. Peter answered and said: “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.” Jesus told Peter: “Flesh and blood have not revealed this unto you, but my Father in heaven. And upon this rock will I build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail.” The question of thought here is why this is the first time when Jesus was using these two words which He had never used, before; the word “church” and the word “suffering”: When Jesus said that upon the rock of Peter’s revelation about Him He would build His church, He also began to reveal the purpose of which He came to earth. He said they would go to Jerusalem where He would suffer many things, be handed over to the hands of the elders, the chief priests, the teacher of the law, and that he would have to be killed and would rise again on the third day. It was this prediction of His suffering, that Peter took Jesus aside and told Him not to go to Jerusalem. And as we know, Jesus then said that Peter should get behind Him, for these thoughts were not of God but of the devil. We ourselves must be very careful when we are used by God. At the very next moment, Satan can get in and try to use us, as well... Later, Jesus took Peter, James and John and led them to a high mountain. There, He showed them His glory which He had spoken about to them, before (V 28). Another miracle happened there: Moses who had not been permitted to enter the Promised Land at his lifetime now came with Elijah, probably to strengthen the humanity of Jesus before His suffering (Matthew 17:1-4). According to Mark, Jesus spoke again to His disciples concerning His suffering and death that the Son of God would be betrayed to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. He said that they would betray him to death and handle Him over to gentiles who would mock Him and spit on Him, flog Him and kill Him. Then, three days later, He would be risen (Mark 10:32-34).

2. Jesus gives a new meaning to the Passover (Luke 22:15-20)

The Passover was probably the first celebration the Jewish people had ever had. They started to celebrate it before the temple was built. At each Passover, the Jewish people gathered themselves in their households. There, they killed a lamb, removed all yeast from their homes and ate bitter herbs. More importantly, they retold the story of the miraculous Exodus of their ancestors from the land of Egypt. But once the temple was built, God told them to celebrate the Passover festival in Jerusalem (Deuteronomy 16:1-6). The eating of the lamb represented the identification with the Jewish community and with the lamb’s death which saved them from their physical death. Even at Jesus’ boyhood it is recorded in Scripture that it occurred that His parents took Him to Jerusalem at His age of 12 to celebrate the Passover with them for the first time because He then was old enough for it (Luke 2:41-50). Later in His life, Jesus regularly went to Jerusalem for the Passover festival (John 2:13). But here in the Gospel of Luke, Jesus said to His disciples: “I have urgently desired to eat the Passover with you before my suffering.” This happened on a Thursday. On this day, in an upper room where they had gathered, Jesus prepared both Himself and His disciples for what was going to come. Here, He gave a new meaning to the Passover. He said that the loaf of bread and the cup of wine would present His body which would soon be sacrificed and His blood which would soon be shared. With this, He instituted the Lord’s Supper which became the doctrine of the Apostles and was later passed on also to us. The Passover lamb was a sacrifice that functioned as a substitution for the firstborn (Exodus 12:27). This sacrifice points to Christ’s death as a

substitute on our place. The heart and soul of the Passover event was God's grace. God brought the Jewish people out of Egypt not because they were better people than others but because God loved them and was loyal to His covenant with them. Similarly, through the salvation, we receive with Christ our redemptive sacrifice. The reality of the Passover lamb is Christ, Himself. Our partaking in the Lord's supper represents our participation in Christ's death. His death saves us from our spiritual death (1st Corinthians 10:16.17; 11:24-26). So in all, as Jesus instituted the Lord's supper, and after singing a hymn, He and His disciples went to the garden of Gethsemane where Jesus prayed in agony, knowing what lay ahead of Him—the stages of His suffering (Matthew 26:30).

3. Stage 1: Jesus was arrested (Matthew 26:57)

The three Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke, known as “seeing together” (synoptic), indicate that Christ was taken directly to the house of Caiaphas who was the current High priest. But John, however, states more specifically that Christ was first taken to Annas, the father-in-law of Caiaphas. Annas was the former High priest (John 18:12-14). Although he was not the ruling High priest, still Annas exercised a considerable influence in Jewish religious affairs. Many historians and Biblical scholars believed that he was the real power behind the Sadducean priesthood. So consequently, they postulated that the hearing before Annas was arranged so that he could determine the direction of the conclusion of the following trial: Annas questioned Christ in two specific points. He questioned Him first about his doctrine and secondly about His disciples. But receiving what he felt were unsatisfying answers to his questions. Annas sent Christ to Caiaphas for further examinations. During the examinations at Caiaphas the High priest's house, the chief priests and the Sanhedrin attempted to find evidence against Christ in order to put Him to death. One method they used was to produce false witnesses to testify, and most of their testimonies did not agree with one another. But they did manage to achieve their purpose. However, when the High priest asked Christ: “Are you the Son of the Blessed One?” to this, Christ responded: “I am.” (Mark 14:61.62). At this, the High priest tore his clothes, declaring: “Why do we need any more witnesses? You heard this blasphemy! What do you think?” (Mark 14:63.64). The members of the Sanhedrin responded by indicating that Jesus was worthy of death. He was then blindfolded, mocked repeatedly, spit and struck on the face. It was in this first stage of Christ's suffering that Peter followed Him to the courtyard and sat around at the fire to warm up. While he was there, some of the present people questioned him three times about his involvement with Christ, but Peter denied it. And as we all know, Jesus had told Peter before that he would betray Him. But one cannot build on this in any way or aspect. The Lamb of God came as a reality of all the sacrifices from Abel to the time of His journey to the cross, and He had to take it alone. No human being would have had the capability grace to stand on His side with his or her own strength. If not, why then could Peter later stand in that same place where he before had denied the Saviour to speak directly to Annas the former High priest, Caiaphas the present High priest and the Sanhedrin: “Judge for yourselves if it is right for us to obey men or to obey God?” (Acts 4:5-7.19.20)! Also, we read that Jesus told Peter: “Where I'm going you cannot follow me now but can follow me, later.” That was exactly what happened in Peter's life and ministry (John 13:36-38).

4. Stage 2: Jesus before the Jewish religious leaders, Herod and Pilate (Luke 22:66-23:24)

The suffering of Jesus Christ in stage 2 began in the morning, probably when Jesus was physically tired. He was taken across Jerusalem to be interrogated by Pilate who was the Roman governor in Jerusalem at the time of the Passover. Jesus was brought to him because under Roman law the Jews could not legally carry out a death penalty. Therefore, the Jewish religious leaders were hoping that Pilate would give his permission to put Christ to death. In their effort to influence the governor, they accused Christ of different kinds of crimes. But after the

governor had questioned the Jewish leaders about the charge concerning the claim to be the King of the Jews, Pilate did not find any basis of putting Jesus to death. The religious leaders, however, did not accept this decision. So they said: "He stirs up the people all over Judah by his teaching. He started in Galilee and has come all the way here." (Luke 23:5). So when Pilate learned that Jesus was a Galilean who was legally under the governmental authority of Herod, Pilate decided to send Jesus to Herod for judgement because Herod was at Jerusalem by that time. This was the same Herod who had beheaded John the Baptist. But because Herod was a hardened person, Jesus refused to speak to him, although Herod wanted to meet Jesus. Apparently, Herod had no desire to judge this case. So he questioned Jesus by mocking him and sent Him back to Pilate. Now Pilate found himself in a difficult situation, having no basis for a charge against Jesus Christ. He wanted rather to punish and then release Him. But the Jewish leaders, however, refused to consider these possibilities. They knew the mentality of their people. So they stirred up the passion of the people to demand the death of Jesus. Pilate seeing that his arguments regarding Christ's innocence were ineffective, probably began to fear the consequences of not agreeing with the Jewish religious leaders. He knew from painful experiences how fanatical the zeal of many Jews could be. Pilate also did not want a bloody confrontation to occur. Therefore, the Jews finally persuaded Pilate to agree with their wishes. They knew Pilate did not concern religious matters. So they accused Christ of claiming to be the King of the Jews which was in conflict with the rules of Rome. And if Pilate would not respond to that, it would mean a political treat. At this time, the people asked Pilate to do what he usually did for them (Mark 15:8), that is, to free a prisoner. By agreeing to this custom, Pilate permitted the crowd to choose freedom for one prisoner. He probably thought the people would choose Jesus, because to Him they had celebrated the Palm Sunday when they sang "Hosanna" to Him. But to Pilate's surprise, the people shouted: "Freedom for Barabbas", who was a freedom fighter and a murderer. Therefore, Pilate asked: "What should I do with Jesus?" The crowd answered: "Crucify him!" In conclusion of this stage 2, I want to say that Pilate's greatest mistake was to compromise with what he knew to be true and right. But for the sake of his position, status and personal gain, Pilate agreed with the evil doers (Matthew 27:18; John 19:4.6). And therefore, Pilate has become the symbol of those who make religious decisions based on political gain rather than on truth and justice. But as Christians, let us not compromise the Word of God! Let us stand for what is right and not for those things that only serve our own selfish ambitions. As Jesus lived, so we are also commanded to live. Above all, it was this second stage of His suffering about which Matthew wrote that Pilate saw that he was not getting anywhere. Instead, there was an uproar starting. So he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. When he was doing this, Pilate said: "I'm innocent of this blood." Also, it was this same stage of Jesus' suffering that John gave us the account of Pilate's conversation with Jesus. He asked: "Are you the King of Jews?" And Jesus answered: "You are right in saying that I am a king. In fact, I was born for this reason. And for this reason, I came into the world to testify to the world. And everyone on the side of the truth listens to me." Then, Pilate asked: "What is truth?" (Matthew 27:18-25; John 18:28-38). Many people think that truth would be a formula, and they refuse to accept truth to be a person. But Jesus is the truth!

5. Stage 3: Pilate had Jesus flogged (Matthew 27:26-29)

The suffering of Christ in stage 3 began with the tradition of the Roman soldiers. They consistently flogged their victims by stretching the person against a pillar or bending them over a low post and had their hands tied. The instrument of torturing was a short wooden handle to which several leather thongs were attached with bits of iron or bone tied to the thong. The blows were laid on the victim's back by two men, one lashing the victim from one side and one from the other side. This resulted in the flesh being cut to such extent that veins and arteries and sometimes even inner organs were exploded. Often, the victim died during the flog-

ging. The suffering of Christ in stage 3 was the time when Jesus was placed in the middle of the Roman Company. The soldiers put a robe across His shoulders, a stick in His hand and pressed a circle of branches covered with thorns on His head. They mocked Him and struck Him on His head and face, driving the thorns deeper into His scalp. When they were through, they took away the robe and clothed him with His own cloth. Then they led Him to be crucified.

6. Stage 4: Jesus on His way to be crucified (Matthew 27:30-32)

The Roman soldiers tied the heavy beam of the cross on Jesus' shoulders. Then, He began His slow journey to Golgotha. Jesus moved on, but it cost all His strength, and He was close to collapse. This inability of Jesus the gentle man of sorrows to carry His cross is no doubt due to the bad treatment and afflictions He had gone through, before. The truth of the matter here is, prophet Isaiah saw it about seven-hundred years before it became reality that by the stripes of His wounds healing and salvation would flow to all who will accept the Lamb of God as their Saviour. For our iniquities and transgressions, He was crushed. And this punishment that brought you and I peace, was seen in these stages of Jesus' suffering. But Jesus decided to pay it full (Isaiah 53:5.6). The soldiers even considered His physical exhaustion and that was why they forced a man called Simon who was passing by to carry the cross to Golgotha. Later, Simon was asked by historians about what he had done for Jesus according to studies, but to the amazement of them, Simon said he couldn't remember anything. In their frustration, the historians asked him if he would do it, again. Then Simon answered: "If I could only feel the touch of His bloody hand, again, I would do it and do it, again and again!" Isaiah also wrote: "He was oppressed and afflicted yet He did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her sheaves is silent so he did not open his mouth" (Isaiah 53:7). This is exactly what happened in the stage 4 of Jesus' suffering. He did not suffer for Himself, but for us!

7. Stage 5: They crucified Jesus (Matthew 27:35-38)

The suffering of Christ in stage 5 started at Golgotha. The cross beam was placed on the ground, and Jesus was laid on it. His arms were stretched along the beam. Then, a heavy iron known as nail was driven into each hand or wrist of Jesus deep into the wood. His feet were also extended and a larger piece of iron was driven into them. After this, they fastened the body with robes to make it hold on the cross; then they lifted the cross also with robes to stand upright. Jesus was now a pathetic spectacle with blood covered Him from head to toe. The Lamb of God was exposed to the view of people. Many watched Him from a distance as He experienced hours of pains. His entire body was in agony. From the flogging, on His back were open wounds that got enlarged through the stretching on the cross. This was the price for our salvation. His life became the fountain of blood that brought us relationship with God. Without the sharing of His blood, there was no remission of sins (Hebrews 9:22). No human zeal can labour to fulfil the price demanded for salvation.

8. Stage 6: Many stoned Jesus with words (Matthew 27:39-44)

We are being told that "many who passed by, held insult at Jesus on the cross. They shook their heads saying: 'You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself and come down from the cross if you are the Son of God!' In the same way, the chief priests, teachers of the law and the elders mocked Him: 'He saved others', they said, 'but he cannot save himself! He is the King of the Jews; let him come down from the cross and we will believe in him! He trusted in God, let God rescue him now!'" In this stage, since of His suffering it happened just as the prophet Isaiah had seen. He saw that instead of being accepted by Israel, Jesus would be hated and rejected by its rulers. Isaiah 52:13.14 describes Jesus' mistreatment by the Jews and the Roman soldiers at His trial and crucifixion.: "My servant

will act wisely, He will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted just as there were many who were appealed to Him, His appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any human and beyond human likeness.” That is what happened to the Gentle Man of Sorrows. Isaiah called Him a “Man of Sorrows” (Isaiah 53:3). Jesus’ mission would involve great pain, suffering, disappointment and grief because of the sins of mankind. And if we call ourselves Christians and think about the price He paid for us, there should be no difference of culture limitations to divide us For He suffered to establish a new cross culture identity. He is the Saviour of the world.

9. Stage 7: The last seven sayings of Jesus (Luke 23:34-46)

a) The word of *forgiveness*: “Father, forgive them, they don’t know what they are doing!” Let us also learn to forgive one another and allow the brotherly love to continue among us!

b) The word of *salvation*: “Today you shall be with me in paradise!”

The end of our destination is the everlasting arm of our heavenly Father!

c) The word of *love*: “Dear mother, here is your son. Son, here is your mother!” (John 19:26.27)

Our attitude in the Christian community should be an attitude of love like family relationships!)

d) The word of *spiritual suffering*: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mark 15:34)

Christ was forsaken for a moment that you and I may never ever be forsaken!

e) The word of *physical suffering*: “I am thirsty.” (John 19:28)

The One Who came to give us living water and whose wells shall never run dry is crying for thirst! If we believe in Him, it does not mean that we will not experience difficulties. But His care will always be there for us in the measure that we need!

f) The word of *trust and assurance*: “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!”

How good it would be for us if we committed all our doings into the Hands of our Maker like Solomon said: “Commit your works into the Hands of God, and you shall be established!” (Proverbs 16:3).

g) The word of *triumph*: “It is finished!”

This means, Jesus has become all that we want Him to be in our lives (John 19:30)!

10. The Lord’s will to crush Him (Isaiah 53:10)

It was the will of God to crush Jesus so that through Him the will of God would prosper among us. His blood has become the fountain of life, and His cross has become our treasure of forgiveness and our hiding-place. And because Jesus died on the cross, a great inheritance has also been given unto us. In His agony on the cross, He interceded for us, and He is still interceding as He is sitting at the right hand side of the Father. Are we allowing the will of God to prosper through us?

11. His suffering and ours

Christ, Himself, Who is our Lord and Saviour, understood early in His life the ministry and mission that brought Him into the earth. At the age of twelve, when His parents found Him in the temple talking with the leaders and religious leaders of His day, He said to them: “Don’t you understand that I must be about my Father’s business? When His disciples argued Him not to go to Jerusalem for the feast lest His life would be taken from Him, Luke tells us that Jesus steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem, anyway (Luke 9:51). He did so even though the shadow of the cross and its impending doom was already casting itself across the earthly life of Jesus. Nothing would stop Him to accomplish His Father’s will. Finally, in the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus prayed: “Father, not my will but yours be done!” This was His final commitment unto God’s will. No wonder He had said to His followers in Mark 8:34: “Who-

soever will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.” The question of thought here is: Are we His followers? The cross of Christ is a symbol of suffering. It symbolizes death, shame, ridicule, rejection and self-denial. When we Christians take up our cross and follow Christ, we deny ourselves and commit ourselves to four areas of struggling and suffering:

- a) We suffer in a life-long battle against sin by crucifying our own sinful desires which we have developed through our culture and its environmental influences known as societies’ sin.
- b) We suffer in a war against Satan and the powers of darkness as we advance the Kingdom of God. We experience both the hostility of the adversary with his demonic host and the persecution that comes from standing against false teachers who destroy the true Gospel.
- c) We suffer the hatred and mocking of the world when we testify in love that its deeds are evil by separating ourselves from both their moral and spiritual standards and philosophies.
- d) Like Jesus, we may also suffer persecutions from the religious world.

Yours in His service, F.P. Arthur (a missionary from Ghana)
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