
THE CRUCIFIXION OF JESUS

The cross of Jesus Christ has become the most recognised and copied symbol in the world. Today it's a popular fashion statement whose original meaning has become lost to many people who wear it or display it.

But in our next five readings, we'll go back and examine what the Bible says about the crucifixion of Jesus. As you'll see, it's not a pretty picture. The events that led to the death of Jesus were completely unfair and out of control; at least that's how it seemed from a human point of view. Jesus was betrayed by Judas and then deserted by all the disciples. He was arrested and denied any sense of due process of law. At the Jewish trial, the bias and hatred of his accusers were obvious. And, at the Roman trial, the judge knew Jesus was innocent but condemned him to die anyway.

Worst of all, crucifixion was perhaps the most gruesome form of execution ever imagined. At the time of Jesus it was used in the Roman Empire as a way not only of punishing but also of humiliating enemies of the state. Victims were stripped naked and whipped to a bloody pulp, then made to carry the wooden beams on which they would be hanged. Modern medical experts suggest that death could occur from any number of causes including shock to the body, loss of blood, or simply suffocation as the weight of the victim's own body hanging from the cross cut off oxygen to the lungs. And the process could take hours or days to run its course. Any way you look at it, crucifixion was a horrible way to die.

One thing you'll want to keep your eye on in this section is the way Jesus reacted to the nightmare of his arrest, trials and crucifixion. Even though he was the victim, he often seems in control of events. That's because the cross was the reason he had come to earth. He also seemed more concerned about others than he was about his own pain and suffering; especially note the things he said while he hung on the cross.

Finally, because the story of Jesus' crucifixion has been told hundreds of times in plays, movies and books, you'll want to pray about two things. First, ask God to help you see and experience these familiar passages in a fresh, new way. And second, ask God to help you understand why Jesus allowed himself to be crucified.

Date:

The crucifixion of Jesus

PRAY Lord Jesus, I'm about to walk with you through the most difficult part of your life on earth. As I do, please give me a better understanding of why you did it.

READ Matthew 26:47-56

REFLECT

Over the years, scholars have speculated as to why Judas betrayed Jesus. Some say he was disillusioned; he lost faith that Jesus could ever become a political superstar for Israel. Others say he was greedy; 30 pieces of silver was an offer no thief could refuse (John 12:4-6). Still others say he was impatient; he wanted to force Jesus into action - like giving Popeye a can of spinach as the bad guys close in.

The truth is, we don't really know what motivated Judas to do what he did. We do know that his act of betrayal was no accident; it was intentional. Judas planned exactly how he would stab his master in the back (26:48,49). Perhaps the most baffling thing about Judas' charade is that he thought he could get away with it. But don't we do the same thing today? It's no good acting as though we love Jesus while cultivating a heart full of sin (Jeremiah 17:9). Jesus saw through Judas and he sees through us.

How incredible then that Jesus still called Judas his 'friend' (26:50). Even though he knew what was about to happen, Jesus offered Judas one last opportunity to change his mind. In fact, Jesus had been giving Judas opportunities to change course throughout the Gospel accounts. The real tragedy for Judas was not this single, dramatic act of betrayal. Rather, it was the accumulation of many little acts of betrayal that led to his final rejection of the Saviour.

But perhaps the most striking thing about this passage is Jesus' confidence. Even though he could easily stop Judas and his posse dead in their tracks (26:53), Jesus allowed himself to be arrested without a fight; he didn't demand to see a lawyer and he didn't even scream for help when the rest of the disciples cut and ran (26:56). That's because his highest priority wasn't to save his own skin; it was to fulfil the mission God had given him (26:54,56). He willingly gave up his life for the sins of the world (John 10:17,18).

APPLY What might it mean to betray Jesus today?

PRAY Lord Jesus, I'm sorry for all the little ways I turn my back on you. Please let me experience your embrace and friendship today.