

The Cursed Cross of Christ **Deut. 21:22-23; Gal. 3:10-14**

Galatians 3:10-14

Have you ever been cursed? In the OT, prophets, priests, kings, and fathers had the power to bless or to curse, and when the anointed of the Lord summoned a curse on someone, it happened. Ex. Noah and his sons; Jacob and his sons.

A curse is a terrible thing. A curse in Scripture meant God had abandoned or forsaken you. This is what Jesus Christ experienced on the cross. His Father cursed Him for the sins of his people. Instead of us experiencing that curse (which we deserved), Christ voluntarily took it upon himself.

Today, we will look at the curse that God placed on Christ as he hung on the cross.

I. Crucifixion on a Cross - A Horrible Death

Crucifixion took place by elevating a condemned person in some way on a tree, a pole, or a kind of scaffold. Two kinds of tee-shaped crosses were commonly used. One was shaped like a capital "T" and the other was shaped more like a plus sign ("+").

After the judgment and punishment was announced, the condemned person was required to carry the horizontal beam of his own cross. The weight of such a beam is estimated at thirty to forty pounds. The condemned person was expected to carry it to the place of execution, which was always outside the city.

The leader of a four-man execution squad led the procession, carrying a sign indicating the charges against the victim. The person sentenced to death was usually flogged at the place of execution before being hung on the cross. Jesus was flogged before Pilate handed Him over to be crucified; that is one of the reasons He needed the help of Simon of Cyrene (Mt 27:26-32; Mk 15:15,21; Lk 23:22,26).

With arms outstretched the victim was attached to the horizontal beam with nails or ropes. Then the beam with the victim was raised and attached to the vertical post, which was sometimes left there permanently – both for future executions and as a warning. Also, a small board or peg was sometimes provided as a sort of seat to bear some of the weight of the condemned person; this was used to prolong the suffering and postpone the death.

The person's feet were then attached to the vertical post with nails or ropes in such a way that the knees were forced into a bent position.

Ordinarily a cross stood only a little above an ordinary person's height so that the prisoner's feet were only a few inches above the ground.

The sign indicating the charges was then attached to the cross.

Death usually came slowly; sometimes a person hung on the cross for several days before dying.

The causes of death were exposure, disease, hunger, shock, and exhaustion. Sometimes death was mercifully hastened by breaking the legs (cf Jn 19:31-36; Mk 15:44).

The Romans usually left the bodies of their crucified victims unburied. As a result, they were often eaten by birds and beasts, thus adding to the disgrace of crucifixion.

There was always an audience for such an event. And, those who passed by could also watch the gruesome scene. They would add to the suffering. Matthew reports that "those who passed by hurled insults at him"; and "the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders mocked him (Mt 27:39,41; cf Lk 23:35-36, 39-43). Since death came slowly to a crucified person, there was ample opportunity for onlookers to add to the suffering.

Crucifixion was such a horrible way to die that Roman law forbade the crucifixion of a Roman citizen. Crucifixion was used by the Romans to execute slaves and foreigners who were found guilty of a crime.

Jesus carried an ugly cross.

II. Crucifixion on a Cross - A Cursed Death

There is more to the cross than its physical suffering and pain. Deuteronomy 21:22-23 speaks to this. The Jews used stoning for capital punishment. Sometimes after death they would hang the dead body on a tree, or they would expose it impaled on a pole. But they would never leave the body there overnight because that will "desecrate the land" or make it unclean.

Why? God blessed the promised land. If the land was blessed, nothing that was cursed could dwell there. And since the hung body was a symbol of sin and its curse, it could hang only long enough for people to get the message.

Scripture makes clear that the ultimate authority to bless and to curse belongs to God.

When Paul says, *cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree*, he means the curse of God rested on Jesus when He hung on the cross. *He was unclean*. He bore the burden of the curse of God. It was ultimately God Who cursed Him, for He has the ultimate authority to curse and to bless.

What does it mean to be cursed? To be cursed means to be visited by the judgment of God. God wants nothing more to do with a person, a nation, a thing, or a place. To be cursed by God means to be abandoned by God. To be cursed by God, therefore, is something to be feared and shunned. This is the worst part of the cross – to be cursed by God. Crucifixion is a sign of God's curse.

III. Crucifixion on a Cross - Salvation in the Curse

Gal. 3:13 As sinful people living in a sinful world, it is you and I who should be cursed by God. But Christ took our place and took our curse. He became a curse for us. Answer 39 of the Catechism says, *This death convinces me that he shouldered the curse which lay on me, since death by crucifixion was accursed by God*. The curse was something that He took upon Himself. The curse was not something He deserved; it was something He willingly took upon Himself. He did this for you. *The cross means forgiven*.

Paul realizes that the cross is a beautiful cross for those who believe. That is why Paul says in Galatians 6:14, *May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ*.

After his conversion, Paul had many other things he could have boasted about. *Yet, Paul boasts in nothing but the cross of Christ Jesus*. Paul boasts in the cross because it means salvation.

May you boast in nothing but the cross of Christ!