

The crucifixion of Jesus as described by Dr. J van Zyl

Jesus was pushed onto that cross with one arm outstretched along the cross piece. A four sided nail ($\pm 15\text{cm}$) with a sharp point was hammered through His wrist. I believe it was through His wrist as there is only soft tissue in the hand, which would tear under the weight of the body hanging thereon.

In the wrist there are eight small and two long bones held together by powerful ligaments, capsules and tendons. These bones were torn apart by the penetrating nail and the pain must have been indescribable. We know how painful it is just to strain a wrist. A large nerve, namely the median nerve, runs parallel to the wrist and in the centre, which supplies movement to the thumb and sensation to a large portion of the hand. This nerve was stretched over one of the four corners of the nail like a guitar string over the bridge, causing severe cramps in the thumb, and causing imbedding of the thumb nail deep into the palm of the hand.

One of the most painful conditions is that of a nerve being stretched, and this is precisely what occurred. Every one has had the experience of being in a dentist's chair and having a tooth drilled. As the drill comes within the vicinity of the nerve of that tooth (which is the thickness of a hair), the pain is extreme. Can you just imagine how excruciating it is to have a large nerve, which is the thickness of a knitting needle being in a constantly stretched position, over the sharp side of the nail?

They took the other arm of Jesus and stretched it to the maximum position in the opposite direction. The second nail was driven through His other wrist, deep into the wood. His two feet were positioned flat up against the cross, one over the other. A longer nail of similar design was driven through the small bones of both feet - tearing them apart. It is important to note that His knees were in a bent position (flexed), there is a reason for this which we will discuss later. The cross was lifted up and dropped into a hole prepared for it. From that moment the struggle between life and death commenced.

When the cross struck the bottom of the hole, the momentum of the body, because of its weight, continued in a downward position. This causes not only further tearing of tissues, skin, tendons etc. but the shoulder joints were jerked out of their sockets. The psalmist tells us that every joint of His body was dislocated (Psa 22:14). The chest muscles were pulled in an upward direction, causing the chest to be pulled up in a position of maximum inspiration. This is similar to a severe asthma attack as the lungs were kept full of air. This resulted in a shortage of oxygen in the blood stream causing the skin to become cyanotic (blue colour), the eyes to become bloodshot and protruding, a profuse condition of perspiration as in suffocation, and this sweat then ran into the raw wounds accentuating the pain. This condition is known medically as respiratory acidosis.

Soon the muscles were deprived of even the little oxygen that had remained in the blood, with the result that muscular cramp developed over the whole body. This condition is known medically as metabolic acidosis, and can be compared with the cramps developed by an unfit athlete when in training. Imagine the pain experienced because of these cramps! - (we have each one of us experienced a cramp in a leg at some time or another).

The only way in which the crucified could receive some measure of relief was to straighten his knees, placing the full weight of the body on that solitary nail through the feet. The muscles pulling up the chest would thereby slacken, and the chest move down making expiration (breathing out) possible. At this point the pain was so severe because of the weight on the nail in the feet, that although breath was desperately needed, He had to take that breath very quickly and bend the knees again, replacing the body weight onto the shoulders.

This process continued for hours whilst weakening progressed. Eventually the person was too weak to straighten the legs and suffocation took place. During this struggle a condition of acute heart failure developed and water was formed around the heart. In the case of Jesus this suffering on the cross took six hours.

It was common belief at that time that the crucified was cursed and if the body was not removed before sundown, a curse would return to that land (Gal 3:13). Because of this belief, the soldiers would take an iron rod and break the legs below the knees of those who had not yet died before sunset. This would make it impossible for them to straighten their legs in order to breathe and they died of suffocation.

When they came to Jesus, however He was already dead. This fulfilled the prophecy which stated that not a bone of His body was broken (Joh 19:32-33). A Roman soldier took a spear and pierced the side of Jesus. I believe it was His right side so that it could penetrate His intestines, liver, lungs and into His heart (Joh 19:34). As the spear penetrated the heart, water and blood poured out.

If you grasp this picture of indescribable suffering and mutilation, you will realise that the body of Jesus was unrecognisable, and it certainly bore no resemblance to the pictures of Jesus on the Cross presented to us by tradition; namely that of Jesus with an angelic expression, hair neatly combed into place, with here and there a spot of blood and a loin cloth draped around His hips. I believe that He hung there naked. This was the greatest form of humiliation known to a Jewish man - to be exposed in public.

Just as many were astonished at you, so His visage was marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men; (Isa 52:14)

Never was a body so mutilated as that of Jesus Christ the Son of God, who paid the price for our Salvation and Healing.

Can you see how His body was broken from the crown of His head where thorns penetrated, to the soled of His feet - penetrated by nails - every part of His body was broken for the healing of our bodies. His head, eyes, nose, ears, teeth, lips, skin, lungs, intestines, liver, heart, and so we can go on; for the "whosoever will" believe and receive by faith so great a sacrifice.

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