What really happened on the Cross

Introduction

Because of complete darkness during the hours of the crucifixion, it would have been difficult for those in vicinity of the Cross to clearly observe what was happening on it (Matt. 27:45). Therefore, to know what really happened on it we have to depend on what was revealed to the prophets of the Old Testament. Their description of Jesus on the cross does not correspond with the pictures that we usually see of Him hanging on it.

Why is the suffering of Jesus emphasised so much in Scripture?

> *"For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified"* (1 Cor. 2:2).

The suffering of Jesus on the cross was not unique, because next to Him two robbers were also crucified. Crucifixion was a common way of punishing criminals in those days (Matt. 27:38**)**. So also, many of the followers of Jesus had to suffer cruel martyrdom and in Hebrews 11 we read of how some believers were even sawn in half! (See *Fox's Book of Martyrs).* If the suffering of Jesus was not unique, why does Scripture emphasise it so much? **Galatians 3:13** and **1 Peter 2:24** give us the answer:

> *"Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, **being made a curse for us** (for it is written, "Cursed is everyone having been hanged on a tree"* (Gal. 3:13, my emphasis).

How did Jesus redeem us from the curse of the law? – He redeemed us from the curse of the law by taking the punishment for breaking it upon Himself – **in His body!**

> *"But it was for our sins he was wounded, and for our evil doings he was crushed: **he took the punishment** by which we have peace..."* (Is. 53:5, my emphasis, BBE).
>
> *"Christ himself carried our sins **in his body** to the cross, so that we might die to sin and live for righteousness...* (1 Pet. 2:24, my emphasis).

What was the punishment He had to suffer in His body?

In order to know we have to understand what the curse of the law entailed. It is explained in Deuteronomy 28:15-68:

> *"...if you will not listen to the voice of Jehovah your God, to observe and to do all His commandments and His statutes which I command you today, **all these curses shall come on you** and overtake you"* (Deut. 28:15, my emphasis).

According to Galatians 3:13 believers have been redeemed from the curses mentioned in Deuteronomy 28. It is interesting to note that Deuteronomy 28:25 declares that the one being cursed would become *"a thing of horror"* (Deut. 28:25, NIV).

1 Peter 2:24 is usually read with the emphasis on the benefits of the crucifixion for the "us" and the "we" and the "me." If read from a wider perspective of what is revealed in Scripture, a shift in emphasis takes place and our attention is drawn to **what Christ had to suffer in His body:**

> ***"****Christ himself carried our sins* ***in his body*** *to the cross...* (1 Pet. 2:24, my emphasis).

A Prophetic description of what happened on the Cross

The description given in Psalm 22 of Jesus on the cross does not correspond with traditional pictures of the crucifixion. Although Psalm 22 is called a Psalm of David, certain details given in it cannot refer to him, because at no stage in his life were his **hands and feet pierced** (v.16) or did soldiers cast lots for His clothing (v.18). It must be noted that some Bibles like the 1983 Afrikaans version state that His hands and feet were bound, which does not correspond with what is described in John 20:25 where Thomas wanted to see the marks of the nails in the hands of Jesus and touch the wound in His side.
If such minor details in Psalm 22 concerning Christ's clothing were literally fulfilled, how much more attention should be given to the prophetic information given in it to what would physically happen to Christ on the Cross! Consider for example the following descriptions:

> *"I am poured out like water;* ***all my bones are out of joint****"* (Ps. 22:14).
> "I can **count all my bones**..." (Ps. 22:17, my emphasis).

These descriptions remind me of pictures I have seen of the emaciated bodies of starved prisoners in prison camps during times of war. Their protruding ribs and bones could literally be counted! What could have happened to the body of Christ that also made Isaiah prophetically call out:

> *"Many people were shocked when they saw him;* ***he was so disfigured*** *that he hardly looked human"* (Is. 52:14, GNB, my emphasis).

How could an ordinary Roman crucifixion do this? It could not have been an ordinary Roman crucifixion, because the Roman soldiers who were doing duty and who were known for their fearlessness and bravery, became "terrified" when they saw all the things that were happening (Matt. 27:54).
In order to appreciate the suffering of Jesus His substitutionary death must be understood.

The substitutionary suffering and death of Jesus Christ is explained in Isaiah 53:5:

> *"But he was wounded for our transgressions, and he was crushed for our iniquities, and* ***the punishment that made us whole was upon him****...* (Is.53:5, my emphasis).

Jesus was "crushed" because on the cross He took the curses that were the punishment for the breaking the law, on Himself. God, who is righteous, cannot allow sin to go unpunished; the sinner has to be punished, in hell, or he has to accept the fact that Jesus was punished on his behalf:

> *"...**He took the punishment** by which we have peace...and the Lord put on him the punishment of us all" (Is. 53:3-6).*
>
> *Jesus was "afflicted...stricken and struck down by God...and **He was crushed for our iniquities**..."* (Is. 53:4-5, my emphasis).

The crucifixion of Jesus was no ordinary Roman execution! The Romans had nothing to do with the curse that came upon Jesus. It was the Father who caused the curses mentioned in Deuteronomy 28, curses like wasting disease, fever, tumours, boils, festering sores and the plague, to come upon the body of Jesus! The effect of the punishment He had to bear must have been horrific, because David and Isaiah prophetically described Him as a distorted figure that hardly looked like a human being (Is. 52: 41, Deut. 28:20-45). In fact, it was no ordinary Roman crucifixion, because when Jesus died the veil in the Jewish temple tore in two, the earth shook, rocks split and darkness came upon the face of the earth, even graves opened up! (Matt. 27:51-53).

Gethsemane

The suffering of Jesus did not start on the cross, because already in Gethsemane His soul was troubled to the point of death (Matt. 37-38). It was so intense that He sweated sweat like drops of blood! (Luke 22:43-44). At one stage He even asked the Father, if it was possible, that the suffering be taken away from Him, yet He prayed that not His will, but that the will of the Father be done (Matt. 26:36-37].

The purpose of the Bread and the Wine during communion

> *"For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, **you proclaim the Lord's death** until he comes"* (1 Cor.11:26, my emphasis).

One can partake of the Bread and the Wine in an unworthy manner.

> *"Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning **the body and blood** of the Lord...For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself*...(1 Cor.11:26-31, my emphasis).

Based on 1 Corinthians 11:26-31 believers are usually reminded that if they have something against a brother or sister, they should first make right before taking communion. This interpretation of sinning against the *"body and the blood of the Lord"* cannot be correct, because although believers are called the body of Christ, they are never referred to as the **"blood of the Lord."** Also, restitution between believers is something that must be done continually, not only during communion services. The reference to the body and blood of the Lord must therefore be a reference to what happened to the physical body of Christ on the cross.

What were the consequences for some of the Corinthians for eating the bread and drinking the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner?

> *"For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself...That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. "* (1 Cor. 11:30-31).

If believers have been redeemed from the curse of the law, why were some of the Corinthians judged in such a harsh way and why do certain of the things mentioned as curses in Deuteronomy, still happen to Christians?

There is no simplistic answer, but of one thing we can be sure, the Father will not place anything that His Son paid for dearly on the cross, as a curse on His children. We can also be assured of the fact that whatever the Father allows in our lives, **even chastening** and discipline, that it will ultimately contribute to the end goal of conforming us more and more to the image of his Son:

> *"My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the Lord loves* ***He chastens, and He scourges every son*** *whom He receives... but...for our profit, that we might be partakers of His holiness"* (Heb. 12:5-10, my emphasis).

When believers, like some of the Corinthians, blatantly continue sinning and do not appreciate the fact that Jesus suffered to bear the punishment for our sin, they sin against the *"body and the blood of the Lord"* (1 Cor. 5). The Corinthians, because of their sin, had to be disciplined by the Lord:

> *"For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep. But* ***if we judged ourselves****, we would not come under judgment.* ***When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world"*** (1 Cor.11:27-32, my emphasis).

Whatever method the Lord uses to discipline His child, it will not include the loss of salvation.

Certain things that happen to us are not always our Heavenly Father chastening us, but can be the consequences of our own unwise actions and decisions. As far as sicknesses are concerned we are often victims of our own unhealthy eating habits and unhealthy life style. Sometimes other physical factors are involved over which we have no control (John 9:1-3). The wise thing to do when we get sick is to firstly judge ourselves in terms of unconfessed sin and then apart from making use of doctors and medicine, to call for mature believers to anoint us with oil and to pray for our healing (James 5:14-16).

Conclusion

Our salvation and blessings rest on the substitutionary work of Christ Jesus on the Cross:

> *"Him who knew no sin He made to be sin on our behalf; that we might become the righteousness of God in Him"* (2 Cor. 5:21).

Nick Maartens
Jeffreys Bay
0827826074, www.nickmaartens.co.za