

What Kept Jesus on the Cross?

Colossians 2:13-15

The History Behind the Act of Crucifixion

In the ancient world, crucifixion was considered the most severe form of capital punishment. In order of severity, decapitation was the least painful and was reserved for citizens of rank. Somewhere in the middle of severe capital punishment was being burned alive. The last and most painful was crucifixion, which was reserved for slaves and criminals. It was the slowest and most excruciating of death by capital punishment.

The rulers of the Roman provinces favoured crucifixion because of the public statement that it made. A Roman orator, Quintiliano, wrote *“Whenever we crucify the guilty, the most crowded roads are chosen, where the most people can see and be moved by this fear.”*

The Romans did not invent death by crucifixion. The Persians, Medes, Carthaginians, and Assyrians all practiced it in various forms. To trace it back, one finds that the bodies of the defeated in war were displayed in this manner. As a warning to others who might be tempted to rebel, they pierced the conquered on poles or stakes.

Crucifixion was death by exhaustion—every minute consumed with the painful necessity of struggling to suck in another breath.

The legacy of death by crucifixion is still with us in the word *“excruciating”* which literally means *“out of the cross.”* To extend the life and also the torment, the executioners took care not to damage the person’s vital organs. If they performed everything properly, the victim could hang for as long as nine days before death finally came.

Jesus’ Crucifixion

When Jesus was led to mount Golgotha, “the hill of the Skull” three soldiers stretched Jesus out on the cross-beam while another soldier picked up 3 long iron nails or spikes. The nails were a tapered shaft from 5 to 7 inches long and about half an inch in diameter.

The Roman soldier swings the mallet high. The women turn away. The mallet falls and drives the nail through the flesh of Jesus and into the wood of the beam. The nail is forced between the two bones, the ulna and radius, just above the wrist joint. If it were placed only in the hands, the sheer weight of the body would cause the person to fall from the cross.

The nail comes dangerously close to the radial and ulnar arteries in the hand, perhaps even severing them and the blood of Jesus begins to fall to the earth.

Seconds later, the other arm follows and then the feet are overlapped and a single nail is forced into the feet of Jesus.

The soldiers hoist the beam up and drop it into place and the dropping of the cross into the hole multiplies the excruciating pain because of the jolt. We know that Jesus could have come down from the cross. The nails driven into His hands and feet by the Roman soldiers couldn’t hold Him on the cross, but that day He chose the nails and to stay on the cross.

Christ’s Greatest Work

Christ’s greatest work was accomplished on Calvary’s cross when he died for our sins. Did you know that the nails driven by the soldiers could not hold Jesus on the cross – He had the power to come down from the cross but He did not?

In John 10:17-18 Jesus said, *“The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again, No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.”*
Jesus had absolute authority and power over His dead.

Yet, that day there were 3 invisible nails that kept him on the cross.
The first invisible nail that kept Jesus on the cross was the nail of sin.

1. The Nail of Sin.

The prophet Isaiah, probably more than any other prophet, seemed to comprehend the sacrificial ministry of Christ: *“Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed”* (Isaiah 53:4-5).

Had there been no sin in the world, there would have been no need for the cross. But sin did enter the bloodstream of humanity. It was the nail of sin that held Jesus to the cross.

We read in 2 Corinthians 5:21, *“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”*

It not only was universal sin that held Jesus to the cross – it was your sin my sin. It’s the principle of vicarious sacrifice [taking the place of another]. He took my place and your place of death on the cross. Because the wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23).

God, knowing the hearts of all people, and knowing that they were evil, offered his Son to die for all people: those living and those yet to come.

The second invisible nail that kept Jesus on the cross was the nail of loyalty.

2. The Nail of Loyalty.

Jesus always lived in the shadow of the cross. As a boy he spoke of his Father’s business and referred to his sacrificial work on the cross. His entire ministry pointed to the cross and the fulfillment of the divine purpose for his life.

Jesus said, *“Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.”* (Luke 22:42).

Jesus’ loyalty to the Father’s purpose for his life and his acceptance of the cross qualified him to be our example, but these days it seems that loyalty is rarely seen.

We need a new loyalty to Christ. It is a loyalty of action, not mere words; it’s a loyalty that will enable us, regardless of the cost, to take our stand for Christ and for his word.

We need a new loyalty to our moral and ethical convictions. Our world and society is leading us to moral bankruptcy and we are lacking the moral strength to resist.

Jesus said, *“If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me”* (Matt. 16:24).

In a supreme demonstration of loyalty to God’s will, Jesus died on the cross. His loyalty should inspire us to be loyal to the cross and *“take up our cross”* and follow him. It was the nail of loyalty that held Jesus to the cross.

The third nail that kept Jesus on the cross was the nail of love.

Can you hear the hammer ring as it hits the nail, skin rips and blood begins to drip and finally pour. Then the question is asked, even by his enemies, "Why? Why didn't Jesus resist?" Why didn't those hands that healed the blind and made the lame to walk deny the pain that was felt? Why? "Because he loved us." That's the third nail that kept Him on the cross.

3. The Nail of Love.

Prior to Jesus' coming into the world, people did not know the love of God nor the kind of love that Jesus had.

Slaves hated masters, subjects hated rulers, races hated each other – the noise of gnashing teeth was exceeded only by the sound of clashing swords raised to destroy the hated enemy.

And in the midst of this hatred, bitterness, intolerance and bigotry, God allowed his Son to be born. But hatred pursued Christ. At Jesus' birth, Herod, full of hatred, sent out a decree that all male infants, from newborn to two years old, were to be destroyed.

Most Pharisees hated Jesus because the truth of his Gospel brought their hypocrisy to light. The high priests hated Jesus because his popularity with the multitudes threatened to lure people from the Temple and the established rituals.

Unperturbed by these existing prejudices, and with the cross his ultimate and determined goal, Jesus declared, "*To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world*" (John 18:37).

The world never had seen such a manifestation of selfless love as was demonstrated by Christ on the cross. Having not seen it before, the world had no ability to comprehend it. It was the nail of love that held Jesus to the cross.

The cross is the place of decision. It is the eternal divider - it separates people into 2 classes, the saved and the lost. Embrace the truth of the cross and be saved. Reject it and be lost.

Today the cross still casts its shadow across the world, and the cry, "Crucify him" still lurks in those who would crucify him rather than own him as Lord of their lives.

Conclusion

Christ's greatest work was dying for us and his rising victorious over death. His purpose was to die, to shed his blood as a substitute in your place and in my place. We must accept Christ's death as our substitute, there's no other way to salvation – eternal life.

And as the hands of Jesus opened for the nail, the doors of heaven are opened for you. The only thing that is stopping our forgiveness is ourselves.

The Bridge Of Sighs

In the ancient city of Venice there is a bridge called "The Bridge of Sighs." According to history at one end of the bridge there was a courtroom; at the other end there was a dungeon. Above the door to the dungeon were the words, "*Abandon hope all ye that enter herein.*"

Try to picture a man who has been sentenced to spend his life in that dungeon. As he walks across the bridge he takes a last long look at the sun and bids a last farewell to his loved ones. He is going to spend the rest of his life without hope and without light. But while he is crossing the bridge, a court official stops him and presses a paper into his hand. When he looks at the paper he finds that it is a

pardon. His eyes are soon dimmed by tears. He is free now; his sorrow has been turned to joy. He goes home to live a new life.

That is the picture of Jesus Christ. People are on their way to hell without God and without hope. But Jesus pardons us, nails our sins to the cross, and gives us new life when we come to Him.

We need to cross that bridge of life.