

Sunday, March 27, 2016 - No Greater Love...

"This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins." (1 John 4:10)

His death occurred on the cross. But the events leading up to our Lord's death are some of the most vicious ever suffered by a human. Matthew 27, Mark 15 and John 19 all describe for us that the cowardly Pilate turned Jesus over to be scourged. While the scriptures are silent about the brutality of this event, we can easily understand the heinous act carried out on the Innocent One who died in our stead.

Scourging was legal prior to every Roman execution. The instrument was a short whip called a flagellum that consisted of several braided leather thongs of variable lengths, in which small iron balls, sharp pieces of sheep bones and/or anything available to inflict extraordinary damage to the human body were tied at various intervals.

For scourging, the man was stripped of his clothing, and his hands were tied to an upright post. The Jews had an ancient law prohibiting more than forty lashes. The Pharisees, always making sure that the law was strictly kept, insisted that only thirty-nine lashes be given (in case of miscount, they were sure of remaining within the law) but whether the Romans made any attempt to follow the Jewish law in this matter of scourging is debated. The back, buttocks, and legs were flogged either by two soldiers or by one who alternated positions. The severity of the scourging depended on the disposition of the soldiers and was intended to weaken the victim to a state just short of collapse or death. After the scourging, the soldiers often taunted their victim.

The Roman legionnaire steps forward with the flagrum in his hand. The heavy whip is brought down with full force again and again across Jesus' shoulders, back and legs. At first the heavy thongs cut through the skin only. Then, as the blows continue, they cut deeper into the subcutaneous tissues, producing first an oozing of blood from the capillaries and veins of the skin, and finally spurting arterial bleeding from vessels in the underlying muscles. The small balls of lead first produce large, deep bruises which are broken open by subsequent blows. Finally the skin of the back is hanging in long ribbons and the entire area is an unrecognizable mass of torn, bleeding tissue. When it is determined by the centurion in charge that the prisoner is near death, the beating is finally stopped.

Scourging, called verberatio by the Romans, was possibly the worst kind of flogging administered by ancient courts. While the Jews administered whippings in the synagogues for certain offenses, these were mild in comparison to scourging. Scourging was not normally a form of execution, but it certainly was brutal enough to be fatal in many cases. The beating left the victim bloody and weak, in unimaginable pain, and near the point of death. A person certainly could be beaten to death by the scourge if that was desired. Its purpose was not only to cause great pain, but to humiliate as well. It is no doubt that weakness from his

scourging was largely the reason Jesus was unable to carry his cross all the way to Golgotha.

The stage has been set.

Our next study will deal with His time on the cross.