

## John 19:1 - "The Pillar and the Whip"

Midweek Lent IV - 2021

Let's quickly review what we've covered so far using symbols of Jesus' passion.

First, the Cross in the Cup reminds us of Jesus' words in the Garden of Gethsemane, "*My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will*" (Matthew 26:39). Unfortunately there was no way to save us from our sins but through the suffering and death of God's only Son. Thankfully, since Jesus was "*obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross*" (Philippians 2:8) in order to pay for our sins but then rose from the dead in victory over our sins and death, He assures us that the same victory awaits us at the end of the times of suffering and death we experience in this world for the good of Christ's body, the Church.

Second, the Crowing Rooster reminds us of Peter's betrayal and ours whenever we (like Peter) are quite about our faith for fear of persecution. But the Crowing Rooster also reminds us of the rising sun, and the new day that dawns through Jesus rising from the dead to give us His forgiveness and eternal life in paradise, thus making us bold (like Peter after Jesus' resurrection) when it comes to sharing the Good News of salvation through Jesus Christ with others.

Third, the Thirty Pieces of Silver reminds us of the price Judas accepted for betraying Jesus, causing us to ask ourselves: What is our price for betraying Jesus? This can mean not only what we hope to gain by our sins, but also what we deserve because of our sins. The bad and good news is that, while "*the wages of sin is death* (that's what we deserve), *the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord*" (that's what we gain through God's gift of faith in Jesus' death and resurrection for our salvation).

This evening we consider the Pillar and the Whip. Jesus had already stood before the religious leaders, who charged Him with blasphemy; a crime worthy of death. But they were not permitted under the Roman government to stone Jesus to death, the prescribed method of punishment for blasphemy according to OT laws (Leviticus 24:10-16). So they brought Jesus to Pilate, who passed Him on to Herod, who passed Him back to Pilate. Eventually Pilate told the religious leaders and their crowd of supporters, who were waiting outside for a verdict, "*I find no guilt in him.*" But that did not satisfy the faithless mob who wanted Jesus crucified. So, in a final attempt to spare Jesus' life, were told in our text that "*Pilate took Jesus and flogged Him.*"

If you saw the Mel Gibson movie called "The Passion," you have some idea of what is meant by the word "*flogged.*" The Romans would usually strip the victim of all their clothes and tie them to a pillar. They would then use a whip similar to the one printed on the front of your bulletin. This Roman whip, called flagrum, was designed to remove the flesh from the body of the person being whipped using lead balls or broken bones tied at the end of the leather strips.

Dr. C. Truman Davis, a doctor who studied crucifixion from a medical perspective, describes the effects of the Roman whip. "The heavy whip was brought down with full force again and again across a person's shoulders, back and legs. At first the heavy thongs cut through the skin only. Then, as the blows continue, they cut deeper into the muscle tissue, producing first an oozing of blood from the capillaries and veins of the skin, and finally a spurting of blood from the 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 stopped."

That's why is meant by the words, "*Pilate took Jesus and had Him flogged.*" We can say it in about five seconds, yet it represents one of the great and horrible tragedies of human history. The equally brief words in the prophecy from Isaiah 53 comes to mind as it speaks of the suffering Servant of God. "*With His stripes we are healed*" (v. 5).

Why was Jesus flogged? "*The wages of sin is death*" (Romans 6:23). So, why did Jesus have to suffer not only tortures of the cross but also being flogged before His death?

Have you ever asked that question when it comes to your suffering, or the suffering of a loved one? Why let us go through so much suffering before calling us home?

I don't have an easy answer to that question. But instead of focusing on the unexplained suffering of this life, our Lord would have us focus on what we know from His Word.

While we don't know why Jesus had to suffer so much before His death, we do know that the heavenly Father loves His Son. We also know that He love you and me.

We know that because of our sins we deserve far worse than any suffering we experience in this life—we deserve eternal suffering and death.

We know God promises "*that for those who love God all things work together for good*" (Romans 8:28)—for our eternal salvation.

Can we always explain how our times of suffering in this life works for the good of ourselves or others? No. But we can always rest assured in God promise that those "*Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved*" (Mk 16:16).

So, when it comes to unexplained suffering, let us remember Jesus' unexplained suffering before His death when He was flogged. Let us also remember the ultimate good that came out of Jesus' death and resurrection. Together they enable us, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to trust in God during good times and bad.

We don't need to know all the details behind our suffering or the suffering of our loved ones once we know God's love and forgiveness through Jesus Christ, who suffered being flogged for you and me.

All glory be to God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.