

27:50 "Again" - after "It is finished". The Diaglott of Mt. 27:50 suggests that this cry *was* the giving up of the spirit: "Then Jesus crying out again with a loud voice, expired".

27:51 *The veil of the temple*- The way into the most holy was now open to all, the veil torn from top to bottom because this was done by God. The High Priest's garments had been torn by him, and now the veil itself was open. Judaism was effectively over. Direct fellowship with God was now made possible through the Lord's death. We note by contrast how the same word is used to describe how the Lord's garment was *not* rent (Jn. 19:24). .

The rocks were split- "Rocks" translates *petra*, the Lord's special name for Peter. According to the reconstruction of events offered earlier, Peter was present at the crucifixion, a witness to the Lord's sufferings (1 Pet. 5:1), and what he saw there was the basis of his conversion. Perhaps we are therefore intended to imagine the rending of Peter's heart as part of his conversion process; and his path is to be ours, if we allow the cross the same power in our hearts.

Job said that if he justifies himself, he will be condemned out of his own mouth (Job 9:20- he understood the idea of self-condemnation and judgment now). Isaiah also foresaw this, when he besought men (in the present tense): "Enter *into the rock*, and hide thee in the dust, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of his majesty", and then goes on to say that in the day of God's final judgment, "[the rejected] shall go *into the holes of the rock... for fear of the Lord and for the glory of His majesty* when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth" (Is. 2:10,11,19-21). We must find a true, self-condemning humility now, unless it will be forced upon us at the judgment. The LXX of Is. 2:19 speaks of a rending of the rocks, exactly the same phrase as occurs in Mt. 27:51 about the crucifixion. Rending of rocks is common judgment day language (Nah. 1:5,6; Zech. 14:4), and consider too how this happened in the theophany of 1 Kings 19:11,12, in which the still small voice would be comparable to the message of the cross.

27:52 *The graves were opened*- Not in order to let the bodies climb out, for they were already decayed; but rather as a visual witness to the fact the Lord had conquered death. Likewise at His own resurrection, the Angelic rolling away of the stone was not simply so that the Lord could walk out into the open air, as if He was otherwise trapped behind the rock. He could pass through walls at ease. Rather was it again a visual witness to men.

27:53 *After His resurrection*- The graves were open for three days, and the bodies only came out of them when the Lord rose from the dead. The message was that His resurrection meant the

resurrection of others, if we identify with Him. This latter point suggests to me that these people were likely known followers of the Lord who had died during His ministry and would've been well known to those who saw them.

Appeared- The idea of the Greek is not a mere appearance but an explanation or giving of information. These persons were therefore actually preaching something, which supports my suggestion above that they were believers in Jesus.

Holy city- That sinful city is called "the holy city", even though this will only be Jerusalem's title in the Kingdom age, after her repentance (Is. 1:26). What imputation of righteousness! Again, we see how the record *breathes* the spirit of grace. The fact those mocking Jews died in their beds, that judgment didn't immediately come, that the repentant thief was saved and not made to apologize, that Joseph the secret doubter who voted for the Son of God's crucifixion should be spoken of so highly... there are so many examples of God's pure grace to man.

27:54 Beheld- There is great emphasis on people "beholding" (Mt. 27:36,54; Lk. 23:35,47-49). He drew the eyes of all men unto Him (Jn. 12:32). There was (and is) a magnetism about the cross.

The point has been made that the sight of the crucifixion process divided people into the only two categories which exist in God's sight:

- The repentant thief and the bitter one
- The soldiers who mocked and the Centurion who believed
- The Sanhedrin members who believed and those who wouldn't
- The women who lamented but didn't obey His word, and those whose weeping isn't recorded, but who stood and watched and thought
- The people who beat their breasts in repentance, and those who mocked as to whether Elijah would come to save the Lord.

This is why recollection of the Lord's agony is to be associated with serious self-examination and humbled, zealous response (1 Cor. 11:28,29). And this is where our study must lead us.

Feared greatly- Not just the Centurion but the soldiers with him all made the confession that "This was the Son of God". This is the confessional formula used in the Gospels and Acts. They feared because it was exactly that battalion of soldiers who had just hours before so cruelly abused and mocked the Lord. They came very quickly from that extreme of hating Him to a public confession of faith in Him at the foot of His cross. This is the power of the cross in convicting men. I suggest that psychologically, they could only have made this step of faith because they believed that somehow He would forgive them. They perceived a connection between His death there, and the forgiveness of the greatest human sin, the sin of the cosmos, the worst sin ever committed in the infinity of time and space- to abuse and crucify God's Son. Even that could be forgiven. If those soldiers did not have that conviction, then it seems to me that they simply would have cursed their luck and lived the rest of their days with a "certain fearful looking for of judgment".

Truly this was the Son of God- He said it twice: "This was a righteous man (Lk.), truly this man was the son of God" (Mk.). And he might well have added in his own thoughts: "And I've crucified him".

27:55 Watching from afar- There is great emphasis on people "beholding" (Mt. 27:36,54; Lk. 23:35,47-49). He drew the eyes of all men unto Him (Jn. 12:32). There was (and is) a magnetism about the cross. Lk. 23:48 says that there were people 'coming together to that sight'. This might imply that the crowd which was milling around came clustering around the cross once the Lord uttered His final cries and so evidently died. The women also beheld His dead corpse from afar. This seems to be encouraging us to imagine the picture of the Lord just at that point; the dead body on the cross, the victory achieved. It was only at this stage that the curse of Dt. 21 came into effect: "Cursed (Heb. a curse; the Hebrew is *always* translated this way) is every one that hangeth on a tree" (Dt. 21:22,23). These words have been misunderstood as meaning that the Lord as a living being was under one of the Law's curses of condemnation. This cannot be. It must be remembered that crucifixion was a Roman, not Jewish method. The Deuteronomy passage was not written with reference to crucifixion, but rather to the custom of displaying the already dead body of a sinner on a pole as a witness and warning (cp. the display of Saul's body). Sin brought the curse; and so every sinful person who died for their sin was bearing the curse of God. They were to be buried quickly as a sign of God taking no pleasure in the death of the wicked. The Lord died the death of a sinner; He bore our sins, and therefore our curse (Gal. 3:13,14). Every condemned sinner whose body had been displayed had been a type of the sinless Son of God. He was exhibited there for one or two hours (until Joseph got the permission to take the body), totally, totally united with sinful man. And then, because God had no pleasure in this condemnation of sin, the body was taken and buried.

Luke adds that people smote their breasts and 'returned', the same word used about repentance. Smiting the breast connects with the sinner smiting his breast in repentance (Mt. 11:17 RVmg.). The thoughts of many hearts are revealed by meditation on the cross (Lk. 2:35). It leads us to repentance. The prophecy that the Jews would look on Him they pierced and mourn in repentance may have had an incipient fulfilment at the crucifixion.

John notes that all the 'beholding' of the crucified Christ was a fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy about Israel beholding the one whom they had pierced. Simeon had prophesied that a sword would pierce Mary's heart as it also pierced that of Christ her son (Lk. 2:35). This is one reason for thinking that Mary may still have been at the cross when the Lord died. It could be that John took her to his home, arm round her shoulders as she wrestled with the desire to take one last motherly look back, and then returned himself to the cross; and then Mary crept back, almost hot on his heels, or perhaps choosing another route, and hiding somewhere in the crowd where neither her son nor John, her new son, would see her. To me, this has the ring of truth about it. Simeon's prophecy, as that sweet baby in cheap cloths lay cradled in his arms, seems to imply that *as* the Lord's heart was pierced, so would his mother's be. Are we to conclude from this that there was a heart-piercing groan within her, as she saw the spear head enter and the blood flow out? Each time they called out 'Come down from the cross!', her heart must have been in her mouth. Would He? She had learnt the lesson of Cana, not to pressurize Him for convenient miracles; not to catch His eye as if to say 'Go on, do it, for my sake'. But nonetheless, because she was only human, she would have hoped against hope. But now, the finality of death forced itself upon her. And her heart was pierced in that moment. Yet Yahweh Himself had prophesied, years before: "They shall look upon *me* whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for *him*... and shall be in bitterness for *him*" (Zech. 12:10). The use of pronouns here seems to mean that God was in Christ on the cross, reconciling the world unto Himself (2 Cor. 5:19). When the Son was pierced, so was the Father. And so at the moment of that sword-thrust, we see the connection of both parents with their suffering Son. As He was pierced, so were the Father and mother. Here we see the wonder and yet the tragedy of the Divine family. We have a very rare insight into the relationship between the Father and Mary. The notion of personal pre-existence and total Deity of Christ destroys this beauty and mystery. Indeed, the whole relationship between the Lord and His mother and Father is surpassingly beautiful, once His nature is correctly understood. There is so much one could speculate and yet dares not hardly think or say (e.g. whether the Lord appeared to His mother after the resurrection; what their relationship will be in the Kingdom).

Who had followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to Him- The women who stood afar off and watched in helplessness and hopelessness and lack of comprehension *also followed* the Lord and ministered to Him in the Galilee days. Their standing there like that was still reckoned to them as active following and ministry to Him. They also serve, who merely stand and wait.

27:56 *Mary Magdalene*- Mary Magdalene was perhaps named after the town of Magdala. But named Magdalene may mean the Lord gave her that Name just as He gave names to His other disciples. The name derives from the Hebrew *migdol*, ‘tower’. So the repeated description of her as the Magdalene could be implying: Mary the tower- Magdalene. Just as the shaky Simon was described as ‘the rock’, Simon-the-rock, so the shady Mary was surnamed ‘Mary-the-tower’. It was common for Jewish rabbis to give their followers names, and it seems the Lord did this too- but the names He gave reflected the potential which He saw in His men and women. And the name He gives us likewise is a reflection of the potential we can live up to. Mary Magdalene is the most frequently named person in the passion narratives. Clearly the Gospel writers, under inspiration, perceived her as the central figure amongst those who were witnesses of it all. In doing so they turned on its head the prevailing idea that the witness of a woman was worthless. They saw her as the main witness. The Gospel writers clearly see Mary Magdalene as of prime importance amongst the women who followed the Lord. Luke twice places her first in his lists of the ministering women (Lk. 8:2; 24:10). Matthew likewise focuses on how she was at Calvary, at the burial and at the empty tomb (Mt. 27:56, 61; 28:1,9). She clearly captured the attention of the gospel writers.

Mary... Mary... and the mother of the sons of Zebedee- The Torah required "two or three witnesses" (Dt. 19:15); yet Roman law disallowed women as witnesses. Significantly, the Torah didn't. The fact it doesn't, and therefore accepted women as witnesses, was actually quite a radical thing. The records of the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus are carefully framed to show that there were always two or three witnesses present- and they are all *women*:

	Cross	Burial	Resurrection
Matthew	Mary Magdalene, Mary mother of James and Joseph, Mother of the sons of Zebedee	Mary Magdalene, "the other Mary"	Mary Magdalene, "the other Mary"
Mark	Mary Magdalene, Mary mother of James and Joses, Salome	Mary Magdalene, Mary mother of Joses	Mary Magdalene, Mary mother of James, Salome
Luke			Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary mother of James

The emphasis is surely deliberate- women, the ones who were *not* witnesses according to the world, were the very witnesses chosen by God to testify the key truths concerning His Son. And His same approach is seen today in His choices of and amongst us.

Jn. 19:25 speaks of "His mother's sister". It is entirely possible that the sister of Jesus' mother mentioned in the account of the crucifixion is to be identified with the woman named Salome mentioned in Mark 15:40 and also with the woman identified as "the mother of the sons of Zebedee" mentioned in Mt 27:56. If so, and if John the Apostle is to be identified as the beloved disciple, then the reason for the omission of the second woman's name becomes clear; she would have been John's own mother, and he consistently omitted direct reference to himself or his brother James or any other members of his family in the fourth Gospel. Therefore "behold your mother" meant he was to reject his mother and take Mary as his mother, to alleviate the extent of her loss. Finally Mary came to see Jesus as Jesus, as the Son of God, and not just as her son. This was her conversion- to see Him for who He was, uncluttered by her own perceptions of Him, by the baggage of everything else. And so it can be with us in re-conversion. We each must face the reality of who Jesus really is, quite apart from all the baggage of how we were brought up to think of Him: the Sunday School Jesus, the Jesus of the apostate church, the Jesus we have come to imagine from our own human perceptions...must give way when we are finally confronted with who He really is. This line of thought is born out by a consideration of Mk. 15:40,41: "There were also women beholding from afar: among whom were both Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the little and of Joses, and Salome; who, when he was in Galilee, followed him and ministered unto him: and many other women which came up with him unto Jerusalem". Jesus had two brothers named James and Joses (Mt. 13:55). If the principle of interpreting Scripture by Scripture means anything, then we can fairly safely assume that the Mary referred to here is Mary the mother of Jesus. It was perhaps due to the influence and experience of the cross that His brother James called himself "the little", just as Saul changed his name to Paul, 'the little one', from likewise reflecting on the height of the Lord's victory. So within the crowd of women, there were two women somehow separate from the rest- "among whom were both Mary Magdalene, and Mary". Mary Magdalene was the bashful ex-hooker who was almost inevitably in love with Jesus. The other Mary was His mother. Understandably they forged a special bond with each other. Only Mary Magdalene had fully perceived the Lord's upcoming death, hence her anointing of His body beforehand. And only His Mother had a perception approaching that of the Magdalene. It's not surprising that the two of them were somehow separate from the other women. These women are described as following Him when He was in Galilee; and the mother of Jesus is specifically recorded as having done this, turning up at the Cana wedding uninvited, and then coming to the house where Jesus was preaching. The description of the women as 'coming up' (the idiom implies 'to keep a feast') with Him unto Jerusalem takes the mind back to Mary bringing Jesus up to Jerusalem at age 12. But my point is, that Mary is called now "the mother of James...and of Joses". The same woman appears in Mk. 16:1: "Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James...had bought sweet spices that they might come and anoint him". Earlier in the Gospels, Mary is always "the mother of Jesus". Now she is described as the mother of her other children. It seems to me that this is the equivalent of John recording how Mary was told by Jesus at the cross that she was no longer the mother of Jesus, He was no longer her son. The other writers reflect this by calling her at that

time “Mary the mother of James” rather than the mother of Jesus. The way that Jesus appears first to Mary Magdalene rather than to His mother (Mk. 16:9) is surely God’s confirmation of this break between Jesus and His earthly mother.

27:57 A rich man- The Greek term is found elsewhere in the Lord's parables of the rich fool and of the rich man who refused to believe the testimony of Moses and the prophets about Messiah's resurrection (Lk. 12:16; 16:19). Perhaps Joseph had reflected upon those teachings and vowed not to be like those rich men, but rather to give up his wealth.

Arimathea- Perhaps Old Testament 'Ramah', birthplace and home of Samuel.

Who also- He was 'also' a disciple, in God's eyes, in the same category as the women disciples who were so public about their discipleship (:56). Whilst secret discipleship is not the Lord's intention, and He will arrange circumstances so that we 'come out' publically, it is not for us to say that He doesn't count secret disciples as also His disciples, just as He did Joseph.

27:58 Asked for the body- The body was sometimes granted to very close relatives. Joseph is now showing his open affinity with this crucified man. At that time, he didn't firmly believe in the resurrection. For sheer *love* of this crucified man, he was willing to sacrifice his standing in society, his economic position, risk his life, grovel before the hated Pilate to beg (Lk.), crave (Mk.) the body. This was something which only the close relatives of the crucified could presume to do. But he felt already that new relationship to the Lord, and whether or not He would ever be raised he wanted to show openly to the world his connection with Him, come what may. This was the effect of the Lord’s death upon him.

The text records that the Jews desired Pilate for the death of Jesus; but the very same Greek words are used to describe how Joseph desired Pilate to let him have the body of Jesus (Mt. 27:58)- as if to show how Joseph openly undid his request for the crucifixion, by requesting the body. It is twice stressed that Joseph was on the Sanhedrin council. So was Nicodemus (Jn. 3:2). Yet the whole council unanimously voted for the crucifixion (Mk. 14:64). "The whole Sanhedrin" (Mk. 15:1 NIV) agreed the High Priests' plan of action. They *all* interrogated Him and “the whole multitude of them” led Jesus to Pilate (Lk. 22:66,70; 23:1). This is some emphasis. Joseph “was not in agreement” with them, we are told, but it seems this was a position held within his own conscience; indeed, “many” of the elders actually believed in Jesus (Jn. 12:42). It was only the actual cross which brought faith into the open. “You shall not be in agreement with the wicked as an unjust witness” (Ex. 23:1) probably tore out his heart. It may be that these men weren't present and that the Jews broke their own law, that the death sentence must be unanimously agreed. However, I have an intuitive sense (and nothing more) that these men voted for the Lord's death; and that they went along with the discussion in which "all" the council were involved, as to which incidents in His life they could remember for which they could condemn Him (Mk. 14:55) . They may not have consented to what was done in their

hearts, but they still went along with it all on the surface. Acts 13:28,29 is at pains, almost, to associate Joseph, Nicodemus and the rest of the Sanhedrin: "*They* have fulfilled them in condemning him. And though *they* found no cause of death in him, yet desired *they* Pilate that He should be slain... *they* took him down from the tree, and laid him in a sepulchre".

They were secret disciples, fearing the loss of standing among the Jews. It was only after the Lord's death that they came out in the open. It seems to me that they voted for the Son of God to die. But in His grace, the Father emphasizes in the record that Joseph was a good man, and a just; a disciple, although secretly. The grace of God shines through the whole record. Thus only Matthew speaks about the suicide of Judas; the other three records are silent. A human god would inevitably have stressed that the betrayer of His Son went out in shame and took his own life. But the God of all grace is higher than reflecting vindictiveness in His word.

If the Lord died at 3p.m. and sunset was at 6p.m., there were only three hours for Joseph to find Pilate, gain a hearing, make his request, for Pilate to verify that the body was dead, and then for Nicodemus to buy the spices and for the burial to be done. Joseph and Nicodemus must have decided almost immediately what they were going to do. And the lesson for us: Beholding the cross makes us see what we ought to do, it becomes urgently apparent, and then we give our all, with the spirit of 'nothing else matters', to achieve it as far as we can. But we can enter into their thoughts: I wish I'd done more for Him while He was alive, and now, even now, because of the pressure of time, I just can't bury and honour this body as I'd like to. All these things are against me. The self hate and loathing and regret would have arisen within them, mixed with that love and devotion to the Lord of all grace. And there would have been an earnest desire for God to accept what little they could do, with time, the surrounding world, the Jewish culture, the unchangeable past, and their own present natures, all militating against the height of devotion they fain would show.

John gives the additional detail about the concern that Jesus might not be fully dead, and the piercing of His side. It is difficult to tell if a body is dead or not. But there was something about the Lord's corpse which somehow shone forth the message that He had given up His life. " He that saw it bare record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe" (Jn. 19:35). Do we not get the sense here of a man, even under inspiration, grasping for adequate words and finding there are none? This is an experience beyond the paradigm of verbal description. The description of blood and water flowing has raised the question as to whether the Lord had been fasting, or had emptied His bowels in Gethsemane, before the crucifixion. It has been suggested that for this to have happened the Lord would have been pierced from the right hand side above the fifth rib, piercing the right auricle of the heart (from which the blood came) and also the pericardium, from where the serum came which appeared like water. However there are critics of these suggestions, which leaves the possibility that the flow of blood and water was in fact a miracle- hence John's insistence that yes, he actually saw this happen. And he says that he records it so that we might believe. The implication is that meditation upon the cross is what

inspires faith, as well as conviction of sin and repentance. The way the Lord's blood flowed out from His heart is highly evocative of powerful lessons. He gave out from the very core and foundation of His being. We may serve God in good deeds, in writing books, in labouring for Him, without any real demand being made on our innermost self. The challenge of the cross is to give from the very centre and fountain of our life, our very selves, our person, our most vital soul.

Josephus records that victims usually lingered for two days or so before death. The Lord died so quickly. And the legs were broken so that the victims would die quickly (not, as has sometimes been supposed, to stop them running away). These things are harmonized by realizing that there was a support on which the victim could seek temporal relief in order to keep himself alive. Werner Keller explains: "There was often a small support attached called a "sedile" (seat). If the victim hanging there eased his misery from time to time by supporting himself on this, the blood returned to the upper half of his body... when the torture of the crucified man was finally to be brought to an end, the "crucifragrum" was proceeded with: his legs were broken. That meant that he could no longer ease his weight in the footrests and heart failure quickly followed" (8). It seems to me that in keeping with His refusal of the pain killer, His not requesting a drink until the very end, His willing giving of His life... that the Lord didn't press down on the seat, so that effectively He tortured Himself to death. If the victim did not press down on the sedile, the dead weight of the body would cause the intercostal muscles that facilitate inhaling to become too weakened to function. The lungs, unable to empty, would become full of carbon dioxide and death would result from asphyxia. The fact the Lord was making the effort to talk to people and yet, it seems, not pressing down on the sedile... is simply an essay in His self control, in His love, to bother to talk to others... which should inspire us to rise out of our introspection and make the effort likewise to connect with others. Seneca (*Dialogue 3*) writes: "Is it worth to weigh down on one's own wound and hand impaled on a gibbet to postpone something which is... the end of punishment [i.e. death]?" (9). In practice, the victim was only prolonging his own agony by pressing down on the rest. If the Lord didn't do this, He must have been extremely faint. Keller also comments: "In the case of a person suspended by his two hands the blood sinks very quickly into the lower half of the body. After six to twelve minutes blood pressure has dropped by 50% and the pulse rate has doubled". The Lord must have felt His every heartbeat, and therefore been able to sense when He was approaching death (see 38). Yet amidst the faintness, the knowledge that His heart was about to give out, the Lord remained, I am convinced, completely intellectually consciousness. Deep within Him, that perfect mind was centred on the Father and His word. Several Psalms take on a literal reference to the Lord's final agony: "My heart panteth, my strength faileth me: as for the light of mine eyes, it also is gone from me... my flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion forever" (38:10; 73:26).

The physical sufferings of the cross were an especial cause of spiritual temptation to the Lord; just as physical pain, illness, weakness etc. are specific causes of our temptations to sin. Heb. 2:9

defines the Lord's 'sufferings' as specifically "the suffering of death", the sufferings associated with His time of dying. Heb. 2:18 RVmg. then goes on to say: "For having been himself tempted in that wherein he suffered". The sufferings of death were therefore an especial source of temptation for Him. Truly did He learn obedience to the Father specifically through the process of His death (Heb. 5:8). Let's seek to remember this when we or those close to us face physical weakness, illness and pain of whatever sort.

27:59 Took the body- Luke's record that Joseph himself took the body down invites us to imagine him using a ladder, perhaps that used to place the title. However, Acts 13:29 suggests that the Roman soldiers on behalf of Jewish people (i.e. Joseph) took the body down; Pilate "commanded the body to be delivered", implying he gave a command to underlings. So in what sense did *Joseph* take the body down and wrap it? Are we to imagine him humbling himself before the crowd to assist those soldiers in the physical act of taking the nails out and lowering the body down? Or it could be that he attracted so much attention to himself and had to humble himself so much to ask the soldiers to do it, that it was effectively as if he did it. But there is no reason to think that he himself didn't walk out in that no man's land between the crowd and the cross and humble himself to take it down, hearing the gasp from the crowd as he touched the blood and dead body which would make him unclean for the feast. His act was a tremendous mental sacrifice as well as a social and physical one. He is described as "honourable", literally 'well-formed / bodied', as if to emphasis his deportment befitting a leader of men. But he humbled himself before that stake. "He took it down" may imply that the stake was left standing. Or was it laid backwards and lowered down horizontal, with Joseph's anxious hands guiding it down? His contact with the body meant that he couldn't keep the Passover (Num. 9:9,10). The people would have watched incredulous as one of the leaders of Israel openly showed his preference for the crucified Nazarene as opposed to keeping the Mosaic Law. The obsession with cleanliness at Passover time would have meant that everyone was extremely sensitive to what Joseph did.

27:60 And departed- This apparently needless detail is added because Matthew's camera is as it were focused on the closed tomb, with Joseph now walking away from it.

27:61 And there was- They didn't stay there long, but Matthew's camera is focused on Joseph, sealing the tomb and walking away from it, but in the background the camera picks up (blurred and out of focus, as it were) the women sitting there.

The other Mary- The crucifixion record describes Mary the mother of Jesus as Mary the mother of James and Joses (Mk. 15:40 cp. Mt. 13:55)- not Mary the mother of Jesus. It's as if the record itself seeks to show that separation between mother and Son which occurred there. Both Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James- i.e. the mother of Jesus too (Mk. 16:1 = Mk. 15:40 =

Mt. 13:55) came to the sepulchre, but Jesus chose to appear to Mary Magdalene first (Mk. 15:9), and not His own dear mother. Mt. 27:61 almost cruelly rubs the point in: "There was Mary Magdalene, and the other Mary, sitting over against the sepulchre", but the Lord appeared to Mary Magdalene first. Indeed, there is no record that He ever appeared to His mother. This would presumably have been to help her in realizing that she must relate to Him as her Lord and Saviour now, like any other woman had to, and not as a woman with special maternal privileges in her relationship with her now Almighty Son. It must have so pained the Lord to do this- to not appear to his dear mother first. But as He oftentimes acts with us, so He did with her- doing something which even in Divine nature must have been so painful for Him, in order to help her in her growth. We read in Mk. 15:40 that "Mary the mother of James the little one and of Joses" stood by the cross (RVmg.). I take this Mary to be Mary the mother of Jesus, for Mt. 13:55 records that James and Joses were brothers of Jesus and thus children of Mary. Remember that Mark is writing under inspiration a transcript of the preaching of the Gospel by the apostles, as they recounted the message of Jesus time and again. Could it not be that in the preaching of that Gospel, when it came to the cross, James asked to be surnamed "the little one", remembering his earlier rejection of Jesus his brother? Now it is not at all surprising that Saul of Tarsus too decides to call himself 'the little one', through sustained meditation upon the cross.

27:62 The next day, which is the day after the Preparation- Matthew wants to present the day of the Lord's death as being the day upon which the Passover lambs were killed.

Came together- Again we see how the Lord's cross both gathered together and divided people, as it does, or is intended to do, today.

27:63 After three days I will rise again- They were capable of accurate quoting the Lord's words, which means their frequent misquotations of His words were the more culpable and consciously done.

27:64 So the last error will be worse than the first- The Greek for "error" is the same basic word as that translated "deceiver" with reference to the Lord (:63). The first deception would therefore refer to the Lord's [supposedly deceptive] claim that He was Son of God and would therefore rise from the dead; the last error / deception would then be the distribution of the idea that He had indeed risen from the dead. And of course it was exactly this which happened; yet again, we see how the careful, cunning plans of the Jews concerning the Lord's destruction never really worked out. They ended up crucifying Him at Passover, exactly when they did *not* want to do it; their plan with Judas backfired when he recanted and killed himself; their attempt to bribe the soldiers became an openly known secret. Quite clearly, the Lord's death was arranged by the Father and was the Lord's own will, and was in no way merely the result of the clever plots of wicked men.

But there is another possibility regarding the first and last errors. It could be a reference to Mary and Jesus claiming that He was the result of a virgin birth- this, as far as the Jews were concerned, was the “first deception”.

Notes

- (1) Referenced in Craig A. Evans, *Matthew (New Cambridge Bible Commentary)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012 p. 453.
- (2) John Pollock, *The Master* (Victor Books, 1985), p. 160.
- (3) Frank C. Tribbe, *Portrait Of Jesus* (New York: Stein and Day, 1983).
- (4) J.D. Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994).
- (5) W.D. Edwards, *On The Physical Death Of Jesus Christ*, JAMA March 21 1986, Vol. 255 No. 11.
- (6) Edwards *op cit*.
- (7) Susan Garrett lists several Greek words and phrases found in the Gospel of Mark which are identical to those in this section of the Wisdom of Solomon. It would seem that Mark was aware of this passage in the Wisdom of Solomon, and sought to show how throughout the Lord's ministry, and especially in His death, the Jews were seeking to apply it to Him in the way they treated Him. See Susan Garrett, *The Temptations Of Jesus In Mark's Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) p. 68.
- (8) Werner Keller *The Bible As History* (New York: Bantam Books, 1983 ed.) p. 356.
- (9) Quoted in Martin Hengel, *Crucifixion In The Ancient World* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977).

Digression 40: Joseph and Nicodemus

Joseph and Nicodemus were inspired with that sense which we possess all too fleetingly: that in the light of the Lord's death, *nothing else matters*. Paul felt the same, when he spoke of how for the sake of the "knowledge of Christ" (i.e. knowledge of His cross- Is. 53:11), he counted all things but loss (Phil. 3:8). They were both typified in some way by Reuben, who when confronted with the reality of murdering Joseph, spoke out unashamedly in front of his unspiritual brethren (Gen. 37:22; 42:22). Nicodemus had come to the Lord by night, scared to make the total commitment of coming out into the open. But the purpose of the cross was so that we might be separated out from this present evil world (Gal. 1:4). To remain in the world, to stay in the crowd that faced the cross rather than walk through the no man's land between, this is a denial of the Lord's death for us. The Lord's discourse that night three years ago had emphasized the need for every believer to come out into the light, not hide under the cover of darkness as Nicodemus was doing: " Men loved darkness...for every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be discovered. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest" (Jn. 3:19-21). This must be read in the context of the fact that this discourse was spoken to Nicodemus when he came to Jesus secretly, at night. It took three years and the personal experience of the cross to make Nicodemus realize the truth of all this. The disciples on the road to Emmaus were like Nicodemus. They made a great

commitment to tell a stranger that they had believed in Jesus of Nazareth and His words about resurrection (Lk. 24:19-21). Remember how at that very time, the disciples locked themselves indoors for fear of the Jews. They said what they did and took the 'chance' they did, without believing Jesus would rise. They were motivated by the cross to simply stand up and be counted, with no hope of future reward.

Nicodemus and Joseph not only did something which placed them outside the religious and social elite of Israel. They humbled themselves in front of that cross. Joseph grovelled before Pilate for the body, he walked out into that no man's land between the crowd and the cross. Nicodemus bought 300 pounds of spices, far greater than the amount used at the most lavish royal burials of the time. The cost of this would have been colossal; equivalent to tens of thousands of dollars. And he did this on the spur of the moment; he bought it in the three hours between the Lord's death (3p.m.) and sunset (6p.m.). He didn't count the cost, thinking that OK, he'd given up his place in the society and economy, and would now have to live frugally on what he had for the rest of his days. no. Like the widow, he gave what he had, his capital, which many would have more 'prudently' kept for the rainy days ahead. To realize such a huge sum he must have run around in those hours, selling all he had for ridiculous prices (something similar to scenes in *Schindler's List*). The holiday was coming on, and nobody was really in the mood for business. His wife, family, friends, colleagues...would have considered crazy, But all the time, beating in his brain, would have been the sense: 'Now, nothing, *nothing else* really matters at all'. It's been observed: "If the aloe and myrrh were in dried or powdered form, a whole row of sacks would be necessary to carry this weight, and Nicodemus must have had assistance to be able to transport the load. The transport would have been even more difficult if the substance was dissolved in wine, vinegar or oil"⁽¹⁾. Remember the Feast was coming on. To marshal such labour would have been so difficult and attracted so much attention and consternation. The Roman *litra* or pound was about 12 ounces, so 100 pounds (Jn. 19:39) would have been about 75 imperial pounds. Such a weight would fill a considerable space in the tomb, forming a mound which would smother the corpse. Such was their love. It was common for kings to have such large amounts of spices (e.g. Jer. 34:5). Those men were showing their belief that Jesus truly was Lord and King for them. To believe Jesus is Lord and King is not something which we can painlessly or cheaply believe. It demands our all. And there is no reason to think that Joseph 'got away with it'. The *Acts of Pilate* 12 reports that the Jews became so hostile when they heard that Joseph had asked for Jesus' body that they imprisoned him. It should be noted that Joseph didn't do what he did for hope of a future reward. The cross itself was enough to motivate him to give all purely for love of the Lord Jesus; not for any future hope. It could be that the reference to how he "waited for the Kingdom of God" when he begged for the body (Mk. 15:43) suggests that he had lost hope for the future Kingdom at that time, he had earlier waited for it, but now he simply lived life for love of Jesus. And this should be our attitude if we are for some reason denied the Kingdom ahead; that, simply, we love Jesus, and would give our lives for Him all the same, Kingdom or no Kingdom.

We who are baptized into both the death *and burial* of the Lord have a like senseless grace and love lavished upon us too (Rom. 6:3,4; Col. 2:10-12). In passing, the question arises as to *why* Nicodemus bought such a huge amount of spices. Perhaps it is the nature of true devotion to behave in a humanly senseless way. Alternatively, the use of spices was to keep the body from decaying. It could be that he vaguely understood the promise of Ps. 16:10, that the Lord's body

would not see corruption (cp. Jn. 11:39), and thought that by his own extreme efforts he could bring this about. Despite his misunderstanding of that passage, his lack of faith and comprehension of the resurrection, all the same his devotion was accepted.

There is significant extra-Biblical information about Nicodemus. Josephus mentions him as a distinguished man in *Wars of the Jews* II, 20 and IV, 3,9. He is mentioned in the Talmud [*Gittin* 56a] as Nakdimon ben Gurion, one of the three richest nobles in Jerusalem. The Talmud also mentions a story about his daughter [*Ketuboth* 66a]. It relates that one day when Rabbi Johanan ben Zakkai was riding out of Jerusalem, he spoke to a poor young beggar woman, and discovered that she was Nicodemus' daughter. He recalled that her father had lost his fortune, and had not practiced deeds of charity. This rather confirms our picture of Nicodemus. He did indeed lose his fortune, and his previous mean spiritedness was radically transformed by his experience of the outgiven life and love of Jesus. In the light of that, he gave away all. And the powerful impact of the cross of Christ can likewise banish all carefully calculated meanness from our hearts too, and concretely result in real generosity.